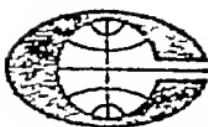


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- a homeless boy who turns into a wild beast
- a psychic consultant whose best friends are ghosts
- a mountain girl who has married a tree

THE SUPER



NATURAL READER

GROFF CONKLIN

COLLIER BOOKS
NEW YORK, N.Y.

This Collier Books edition is published by arrangement with the editor

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First Collier Books Edition 1962

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Introduction

If the reader of this book occasionally feels a slight shiver rippling down his spine, or if his hair stiffens suddenly and he is afraid to look over his shoulder, he need not be embarrassed about it. For in this he shares mankind's innermost and oldest feelings—fear of the supernatural coupled with a tormenting curiosity that leads one on to seek its clammy touch, preferably not first-hand, of course, but rather through the proxy of a well-told tale.

The tale of unearthly beings and their frequent meddlings with man and nature is the oldest literary form known in the world. It is deeply rooted in the beginnings of humanity and probably had its origins in the magic of early man and in the first dim glimmerings of religion. But as the human being and his condition, his relations with his gods, his powers of rationalization have changed through the ages, so has his attitude toward those weird phenomena seemingly outside and above the natural order which he could not explain away. Until relatively recent times even the educated man has lived in terror of supernatural manifestations, often he has taken delight in living through them to tell the tale, but not even in this day and age has he been willing to give them up. The supernatural menace still stalks the steps of the more credulous segments of modern populations ready to grab them by the throat, the chilly horror tale, the fantastic yarn, the spectral tweak upon a ghostly nose are still the delight of our more sophisticated contemporaries.

Supernatural literature is likely to survive long after reason and scientific knowledge penetrate all corners of the earth and the Haitian no longer believes in voodoo, the Irish peasant no longer hears the banshee, the German is quite free of the poltergeist, and the backwoods Pennsylvania Dutch of "hex." There are anthropological as well as psychological reasons for the persistence of supernatural tales. For one thing, they preserve racial memories from the most primitive times to ours, reflecting often the ways of life, the

thought-habits, and the beliefs of various periods of history with symbolic fidelity. For another, man even as a rational individual seems not to be quite free from sudden irrational twinges of fear, puzzling dreams, odd previsions and vague intuitions, which will long continue to be the inspiration for weird tales and ghostly narratives.

Even if these aberrations of the psyche are exorcised in time by the widespread knowledge and use of psychiatry and everyone learns how to control his unconscious so that it will not play tricks, the weird yarn, the supernatural story, the tale of inexplicable horror will doubtless still remain a constant source of entertainment. It is very human to tickle one's senses with fright, particularly when one feels quite safe in his very tangible easy chair and in his own imper- turbable sophistication. Besides, the supernatural need not always be horrible. Even in ancient times there were good fairies as well as malevolent witches and a well-intentioned ghost can be found now and then at almost any period of history. In the last fifty years or so the English, for example, seem to have learned to live very cozily with some of their household haunts, at least in fiction. As for modern other- world beings, you would be quite charmed with some of them. Read, for instance, Herb Paul's story which opens this collection and see if you are not as much in love with the Angel as is the young pilot himself.

There is a curious continuity in the existence of all types of mystic beings throughout the history of supernatural literature. Not one of the horrid horde of ancient lore seems to have been abandoned even in contemporary weird fiction—ghosts, devils, sorcerers, witches, vampires, werewolves and ghouls with whom our ancestors lived on intimate terms are still commonly encountered on the printed page, but often with a difference. The modern writer sometimes looks at them with a certain amount of sympathetic insight, as does Richard Hughes in "The Stranger," a story in which the rich humor of the contemporary Welsh countryside brings an unexpectedly pleasant resolution to the age-old argument between devil and angel. Again in James Hart's "The Traitor," the supernatural being who is most generally feared and

loathed is himself not without fear, not without pity, and not without human impulse

Stories of folk magic and witching never quite die down, nor will they as long as their legends strike a responsive chord upon our ancestral memories. In this volume we have several modern literary versions of this kind of folklore. Charles Tanner's "Angus MacAuliffe and the Gowden Tooch" plays a Scottish tune on the Midas legend. A. E. Coppard's "Piffingcap," in which a spell is laid on the masculine population of an English village, achieves a solid sense of reality through its fine characterization and quiet wit. Will Jenkins' "Devil's Henchman" and Mary Elizabeth Counselman's "The Tree's Wife" are excellent contemporary examples of the gingery, humorous weird of our own Southern hills.

"The Tree's Wife," incidentally, is perhaps a distant descendant of the classic dryads, though our tree—being a man and a mountaineer—has learned a few new tricks. In *A Fable for Critics* James Russell Lowell has Phoebus Apollo say crossly, after he has "treed" Daphne by forcing her to change herself into a laurel in order to escape him—

*"And for mercy's sake, how could one keep up a dialogue
With a dull wooden thing that will live and will die a log?"*

But our little Blue Ridge mountain wife has no such trouble with her husband at all, and neither has their baby.

The medieval preoccupation with the philosopher's stone which would change common metals into gold, as well as the frantic search for the elixir of life which also engaged the minds of many of the best Dark Ages alchemists, are both somewhat out of fashion today. Scientific progress has out-dated them. Transmutation of metals we already have through atomic energy. The formula for physical immortality has not been found yet, but at least we live on the average more than twice as long today as people used to a thousand years ago—an indication that some progress toward the discovery of "life elixirs" has been made. Steeped as these two medieval concepts were in magic, nevertheless they have served science well. They were perhaps the first scientific

stirrings in that era and today they have been developed far beyond their naïve beginnings both in science itself and in science fiction. Science fiction, however, is a separate branch of imaginative literature, outside the scope of the present volume

As in other fields, a lively scientific curiosity in the nineteenth century led to great activity in the investigation of spiritualism and of other supernatural phenomena. Case histories of ghostly appearances were avidly reported and classified by the Society for Psychical Research, founded in England in 1882, and experiments in establishing contact with the spirit world engaged the interest of considerable sections of the intellectual society of the time.

The idea that the spirit is independent of the body and could attain higher mystic powers at will if one but knew the proper techniques helped to spur on a great deal of experimentation with hypnotism, mesmerism, and self-hypnosis. The passage of a soul into another body, an ancient Eastern belief which early spread into European legends, was made interesting to Victorians by the assumption that a spirit no longer had to wait to slip into the body of an infant just being born—it could be urged to move in on any body at all, under proper conditions of hypnotic trance.

Such phenomena offered endless literary possibilities for mystic horror as well as for romantic or humorous situations in fiction, and brought about a renaissance of supernatural writing, especially in England, which is well exemplified in this book. Most of the important writers of the time were intrigued by these notions and produced excellent psychic fiction for their readers' shivery delight. Some of them gave their tales an even more terrifying effect by superimposing extremely ancient elements of supernatural lore upon the commonplace surroundings and the intellectual rationalizations of the time. Montague Rhodes James, for instance, himself a scholarly antiquary and a Provost of Eton College, achieved a pitch of almost numbing terror in his "Lost Hearts" by the use of the most horrifying ancient mysteries in the prosaic setting of a gentle British scholar's home. A more modern tale, H. F. Heard's "The Swap,"

explores the anthropological and psychological aspects of the soul—or the "I"—being lodged in another's body. The results are inconclusive, scientifically speaking, but the observations are fresh and amusing. Some readers may find it instructive, incidentally, to compare Arthur Conan Doyle's treatment of the same theme in "The Great Keinplatz Experiment," which was written about half a century earlier. The differences between the two stories are considerably more enlightening than are the similarities.

The question of the reality of ghostly manifestations, so vigorously thrown into the arena at that time, seems to have left most British and American writers of the supernatural rooting for the phantom side. One gets the feeling that they dutifully tried to make a gesture toward weighing the evidence, but that in the end they usually allowed the decision to be won by the unearthly beings and phenomena with which they had always been so fascinated. May Sinclair poses such a query in "The Nature of the Evidence," but, as you will see, her heart isn't really in her attempt to question the reality of her lovely and passionate young wraith.

The truth of the matter is that there is no use in sacrificing a whopping good tale for the sake of pallid reality. The supernatural story only comes into its own when it refuses to be hampered by the rational and scientific principles of our world. Take a look at such grossly unscientific creatures as Saki's "Gabriel-Ernest" or the obscene horror in F. Marion Crawford's "For the Blood Is the Life," for example. They are terrifyingly real because Saki and Crawford were consummate artists who knew how to make them so, but it would hardly do to submit them to a physical examination and we doubt that we could find a medico who would take them on.

Today the writer of supernatural tales blithely ignores the whole question. He is quite aware, in this scientific age, of the unlikelihood or the downright impossibility of certain phenomena, but he considers it more fun to play with the impossible than with the ordinary occurrence. He may even allow a character to say, "Sorry, I don't believe in this weird stuff," but that's only to heighten the effect of the havoc.

the "weird stuff" is about to wreak upon the hardened realist. And the kinds and variety of havoc a supernatural tale can offer today are considerably greater than at any yesterdays

In addition to the whole weird phantasmagoria inherited from the past, supernatural fiction now can and does play ducks and drakes with the gadgets and devices our vaunted scientific and technological advances have made available to us Consider what happens to the concept of vitamins, an important medical discovery and a leading sales item in our health-conscious civilization, when Babette Rosmond and Leonard Lake decide to play with it in "Are You Run Down, Tired—"? And on a more mechanical plane, note how the automobile is used as a part of the supernatural apparatus in Edgar Pangborn's "Pick-up for Olympus," and also in Harold Lawlor's nostalgic "The Silver Highway" Airplanes, too, are convenient for a take-off into fantasy, as you find in the previously mentioned story by Herb Paul which opens this book.

In short, the scope of the weird yarn is today limited only by the imagination and inventiveness of the writer And if it is true, as it seems to us,* that supernatural writing at least here in America has enjoyed a lively renaissance in the last twenty years or so, it is due in great part to this ever-expanding freedom in fantasy It offers a welcome relief from the confinement of our noisy, cluttered, and often dull and worrisome everyday lives and an escape from the restraints of our complex civilization.

A few brief statistics about this book will perhaps give point to this contention Of the twenty-seven stories chosen, about half were published during the past twenty-odd years—and with only one or two exceptions (Nigel Kneale the most obvious one) all of these recent tales are by American writers H F Heard and John Collier are Americans by adoption, of course Roughly a dozen of our stories were

* Please note the acknowledgment in the final paragraph of this Introduction G C

written about 1900 to 1925 or 1930, most of them before or just after the First World War. With only one or two exceptions these earlier stories are by British writers. Americans did very little supernatural writing in those years, and when they attempted it at all, they were not nearly as persuasive or polished as the ghost-loving British. Today the Americans are putting up stiff competition in the spectral field of writing.

Perhaps the reader might inquire why only two stories were chosen from the vast literature of the Victorian age. Every anthologist must set himself certain limitations between the covers of a book, even a book as large as this one. A story, we decided, to appear in this book must pass several tests (we kept a mystic score scratched in toad's blood on an ancient dragon skin). The most important question is, of course, is it a good story—does it keep us from turning out the bedside light until we have finished it? Does it raise the hair on the nape of our collective neck? Does it make us chuckle with its weird shenanigans and its unexpected twists? If it does any of these things, it's our meat and we welcome you to partake of it. Frankly, the average Victorian tale is likely to do none of these things for the modern reader. Too often stories of that period are dull and wordy, conventional in style and concept, and unexciting to the imagination.

If they are really great and still remain so in our time, they have usually been reprinted *ad infinitum* in other anthologies and everybody has read them so often that they end up by being a bore. So that's another test we apply to a story—we find out how often and how recently it has appeared in other collections (most of the stories in this book have never been reprinted before). The tales by Bierce and O'Brien, definitely Victorian as they are, nevertheless pass our tests with high marks and we hope the reader will like them as much as we do. Although they have been anthologized, it has not been recently, if our records are accurate, and they therefore should be fresh to most of our audience.

Finally, the accumulation of supernatural fiction is enormous in most languages, not counting the native legends and folklore of the peoples who have not yet gone in for short-

story writing A cross-section of this material would doubtless make a series of fascinating volumes, but we have only one book to fill and we have to draw the line somewhere This collection is, therefore, limited to British and American tales, with which of course we are most familiar

Within the stated limitations we have tried to present as great a variety of supernaturalia as possible We haven't tried to classify them into sections labeled "Vampires," "Ghosts," "Devils," "Witches," etcetera, because this sort of thing seems to us to dull the fine edge of anticipation before one has sunk one's teeth into the tale Let the reader find out for himself what kind of horror lurks for him in each story This is not a region of literature that requires explicit and mundane signposts We believe you will be much happier shivering your way from tale to tale without any guidance on our part.

Reality is always with us, and it is pleasant to think that one can steal away from it for a while now and then Today the achievement of such a temporary Nirvana is the major, if not the only, purpose of the supernatural story All we can hope, in conclusion, is that you will enjoy a few refreshing hours of sheer unreality in the spectral world we have assembled for you in this collection. If you do, our purpose will be served

• • • •

This book was originally edited jointly with Lucy Conklin, who died in November, 1954 It owes more than can be stated to her critical judgment and to her exquisite taste In particular, this Introduction was certainly as much her work as mine, and I want to make this memorial acknowledgment of the fact herewith I have changed none of the plural pronouns appearing in the text, since the Introduction was signed by both of us

Groff Conklin

The Supernatural Reader

The Angel with Purple Hair

It was between the dark and the daylight, when the folks up about Fifty-fifth and Fifth are accustomed to stir about in a spirit of restlessness, and she came walking into the dim-lit hush-plush of the Mabuhay Club, slim and lovely in a clinging business of gold lamé, and she whipped the ghost of a smile over Craig Gordon's new dinner jacket with its fresh carnation. Then she expertly folded her wings and slid gracefully into the upholstered corner where Craig puts strangers whom he hasn't quite sized up, and as her beautiful head went by the carnation Craig could see that her hair was a pale purple and he could smell that it smelled of dew on spring roses. She smiled up at him, gently, and then he decided to take a breath.

"Good evening . . ." he said. The "Madame" stuck in his throat and stayed there.

"Good evening, Mr. Gordon." The voice was low as a whisper, and he thought of an Aeolian harp. He hadn't in years.

The crest of one great white wing stirred restlessly behind her shoulder and she frowned ever so slightly. Gordon stepped nervously back and swallowed and remembered to take another breath. He was staring at the wing in terrible fascination.

"Mr. Gordon," she murmured.

He leaned forward attentively.

"Your--your--Highness?" he stammered. It was the only thing to say. He smiled proudly, and a little foolishly.

"You have got the table on my left wing tip," she said.

He dove to his knees, cracking his head smartly on the table in passing. One broad white tip-feather was crushed beneath the gate leg of the table. He heaved frantically at the heavy base and as it gave, the wing tip lifted, stirred for a moment, and came to rest beside the golden slipper heel.

Gordon straightened up hurriedly, cracking his head again.

"Damn!" he said Immediately he was sorry.

"Poor Mr Gordon!"

She touched his forehead with slim, tanned fingers He stayed there Craig Gordon was, and is, a highly intelligent man

"Thank you so much, Mr Gordon," she smiled, and then he got up slowly and straightened his jacket "Now, if you don't mind I'll not bother to order just yet You see, I'm waiting for a friend He'll be here in three minutes "

The right wing stirred and the slim fingers stroked it into quiescence Gordon didn't move He couldn't.

"Thank you, Mr Gordon "

"I'm so very, very sorry . ." he began, bowing and backing away

"It was nothing They do get in the way sometimes!" Again the quick smile, and again that harp in the wind

Craig Gordon turned away and walked slowly back to his post at the gilded doors George, the doorman, resplendent in maroon and gold, his nose flattened against the plate glass, was frantically wagging his white gloves Eloquently Craig frowned The nose unflattened reluctantly, but the heavy glass door swung open a crack

"Boss! Wot'n hell is *that!*" A hoarse, reaching whisper

Gordon stepped out onto the sidewalk and eyed his henchman with pained dignity

"That," he said, "is an angel with purple hair She's waiting for a friend And," he added, "she has trouble managing her wings so let's look sharp with this door "

"Wit poiple hair, he says!" George shook his head slowly and sadly "Look, Boss, them wings woik—I seen 'em move!"

"I seen 'em too!" Gordon replied, and he added thoughtfully, "Now you've seen everything" Then he turned away He looked at his watch About three minutes

George touched his cap as the taxi slid in to the curb and he opened the door with an automatic and practised flourish No tip No lady Quiet-looking young fellow Sunburnt A little wrinkled for the Mabuhay George remembered him vaguely Long and lean Worried look about him.

"Evening, sir!" he said.

"Hi"

He ducked the marquee and a big easy hand brushed the heavy glass door aside

"Hi, Mr. Gordon," he said.

Craig rarely forgot a name. A face never But after all he was a little upset. Then it came back. Jake Halloran, test pilot out at Monarch Aircraft Lot of publicity lately . . . new jet fighter, fast like lightning but with bugs in it Giving everybody trouble Nice-looking kid, this Halloran. Looks as though he's been hitting the bottle . . . a little.

"A seat at the bar, Mr. Halloran?"

"Thanks," and then to the barman, "Hi, Joe."

"Hello, Mr. Halloran, how're things?"

"Quiet. I'm resting for a week. Weary in m' bones. Could do with a martini, Joe"

"Sure thing!" said Joe, who'd had one long look, and who knew when to talk and when to keep quiet "Sure thing!" Softly.

It wasn't until the martini was put lovingly before him that he saw her. It was then that he felt the tension in the place He felt it first in Joe's quick, worried glance over into the room behind, and he took a quick look himself. Girl sitting alone. Pretty girl, but a bad light *Very* pretty girl. Funny kind of a dress she had on. *Very, very* pretty girl!

He turned back to his martini and studied it thoughtfully He didn't pick it up. Then he spoke. Gently.

"You a philosopher, Joe?"

Joe smiled indulgently.

"Psychologist?"

"Not me, Mr. Halloran. I've seen lots of 'em come and go, though"

Jake was persistent. Something on his mind, Joe decided. He put down the glass he was polishing and listened.

"Ever get a sudden feeling that you've been somewhere before . . . same place . . . same time . . . same words . . . but you can't put your finger on it?" Jake studied his glass again

"Know what you mean," Joe said, "happens to everybody —even me, once in a while" Then he added, proudly,

"French call it *déjà vu* Means 'seen before' or something
But you've been here lots lately "

Jake Halloran shook his head

"That's not it, Joe," he said He shook his head again, sharply, and ran his hand across his forehead

He's plenty worried, Joe was thinking Or maybe tight.

No, not tight. Then Joe leaned on the bar and watched

Jake Halloran turned slowly, an inch at a time, toward that dim corner where the strangers sit. His eyes were on the floor until he faced the corner and then he raised them slowly For a long minute he sat there and then slowly he got up and walked toward her

She smiled, and the smile lit up the room She moved aside and the slim brown hand patted the seat beside her

"Hi," she whispered. There was the harp again. "I've been waiting for you!"

"I know," he said

The great white wings moved quietly in the dimness and he saw them move but he was not surprised

"I know," he repeated, and he sat down gently beside her, being careful about the wings "I knew you would be here"

"Of course you knew," she said "I sent for you"

He nodded slowly and looked full into her eyes Then he looked at her hair and he smelled the dew from the roses

"Your hair," he began, "it's lovely"

"Heliotrope," she answered, and then she added, "Pale purple"

"I remember now," he said

"But you've never seen me before!"

"No," he answered, "but I remember"

She touched his hand gently

"You've not been very well, Jake Halloran!"

He looked from her eyes down at the table

"I'm fine," he said and he flexed strong brown fingers

"I mean inside, Jake" Her voice was a caress "What's happened to the boy I followed to New Guinea and back? Lost something?"

"You, I guess"

She nodded thoughtfully

"I thought you were going good Expect I've left you alone

too long" Then she searched his face. "Been drinking a bit, Jake?"

He nodded slowly without answering

"Sobering up," he said "Week of it. I've been having some trouble with that new Cheetah job Too hot Too wild. I was about to blow my top Had to relax someway"

"I know," she said "Have one with me, Jake?"

"You drink?" He was a little startled.

"Scotch and milk," she smiled "Call the waiter, and hurry! We've got things to do!"

By twos and trickles the Club Mabuhay was filling Craig Gordon sadly clicked the switch that controlled the dim wall light over the strangers' corner, and diplomatically steered some of his best customers from their favorite tables He kept nervous watch over the dark corner, and so well had he controlled the lighting that he lost only two customers. In the middle of frozen daiquiris Those wings! The hair, alone, the Mabuhay could handle

Jake Halloran paid his check at the bar and studied the gilt and plate glass door carefully. He looked over the chattering crowd and eased over to Craig Gordon's post by the door

"Got a back entrance, Mr Gordon?" he queried anxiously.

"Know what you mean, Mr Halloran," Gordon replied "There is a back door, but it's out through the storeroom. Narrow Boxes and stuff She'd never make it!" He peered speculatively over Halloran's shoulder

"Thanks Will you get me a cab? A big one?"

Gordon nodded nervously and eased the glass doors open a crack.

"George," he said, "get me the biggest cab you can find and look sharp on this door!"

The nose flattened immediately, against the glass.

Jake Halloran stood by the table and looked down.

"Let's go," he said "We've got things to do"

She stood up The wings settled smoothly along the sheath of gold lame A crackling silence filled the Club Mabuhay.

"Let's go," she said

George was sharp with the door.

Behind there was bedlam

The big taxi swung smartly into Sutton Place and pulled up near the corner of Fifty-sixth "This is it," said Jake

"Costume party, hey Mac?" quipped the driver brightly

"I can only stay a minute, Jake," she said "Things to do"

"Gotta find you a place to stay," said Jake "Like the Plaza?"

"I think I would Do you?"

"Yup know the assistant manager We'll call him "

"Good!" she murmured "And do I meet Stewart now?"

"You know about Tom?"

"Sure!"

"Nice guy With me at Nadzab "

She smiled

"I know," she said "I know him well I rode with him one day"

"I'm jealous "

"Not of Tom, Jake He needed me that day "

"I remember," he said "It was the day the Betty tagged him over Buna "

"And then you tagged the Betty!"

"You put me there!"

She smiled up at him as they climbed the stairs

"I love you," he said

He swung the door open wide and the wings came through and Stewart sat there with the phone in one hand and a glass in the other and he had on a pair of chartreuse shorts That was all He didn't look around but he saluted backward, over his shoulder, with the glass

"But darling," he was saying to the phone, "I'm a changed man That night was years ago and I'm more mature now!" And then he listened and covered the mouthpiece with the back of his glass hand "Hi, Jakel" he said to the room behind "How's about a short one?"

"Company, Tom," Jake said gently

The great white wings were spread softly over the back of the divan and the smile warmed the room and the voice that belonged to the wind was speaking

"Hi, Tom," she said

Stewart spun off the chair and made a wild leap for the bathroom door And then he saw the wings He froze, and the glass in his hand dropped quietly onto the carpet.

"Hello, Tom Stewart!" she said again

He forgot the phone, and the glass and the chartreuse shorts

"I know you," he said and his eyes were fixed and glazed.
"What have you done to your hair?"

"Potts thought I was kidding," Jake explained as they rolled up to the Plaza's Fifty-ninth Street entrance "I don't know him very well, but they're nice folks here and they'll take care of you if anyone can They'll even keep French poodles" Thoughtlessly.

She was hurt He knew it immediately and contrition came flooding

"Darling, I'm sorry!"

She touched his arm.

There was a whispered flurry from the lobby as they walked in Mr. Potts, at the desk, took one glance Precursory Practised

"Good evening, Mr. Halloran . . . and is this the . . . this the . . ."

The wings were stirring restlessly.

"My God!" said Mr. Potts and he beckoned aimlessly, frantically behind him Four bellmen and two desk clerks sprang forward Only one of them made it. A boy from Brooklyn

"We'd like to go right up, Mr. Potts," said Jake. "I'll register for her in a few minutes"

Mr Potts had not spent fifteen years on the Plaza desk for nothing To give him full credit let it be said here that he made a nice recovery At least he was making a nice recovery until the pigeons came in. Four of them. Straight through the open doorway that looked out on to the Park. They made one swift circuit of the lobby and lighted with a whistling swish beside the golden slippers The Plaza's Fifty-ninth Street lobby was suddenly filled with the gurgling croon of four of the fattest, dirtiest pigeons that Central Park could

offer Pigeons in ecstasy. Round and round the floor before her they waltzed and pirouetted.

One of them fluttered joyously to her shoulder, and she leaned her lovely head toward it and from deep in her throat came a soft, melodious purring croon From the Palm Court

from the East lobby from the Oak Room white, staring faces came pouring Well-bred faces Cultured voices But all the mouths were open, and the voices were hoarse and strained

"Please come this way, Mr Halloran, Miss . . . Miss . . . ?"

Potts made a nice recovery Shows what training will do

The pigeons came too So did the contents of the East lobby, and the Palm Court, and the Oak Room So did a couple of querulous policemen.

The multitude approached the south elevators The pale purple head leaned caressingly toward the pigeon on the golden shoulder Again that deep-throated croon. But this time with a rising inflection. The pigeon launched itself past Mr Potts's head The three others, waddling behind the golden slippers, whistled up and away and they were suddenly gone The soft brown eyes that fixed on Mr Potts were misty

"Mr Potts," she said, "Mr Halloran and I should like to be shown to my room, and there be served a Scotch and milk. Alone "

"And that's the way it is," Jake was saying "The way I figure it this new turbo jet is just a mite too potent for this little ship I've worried and worked and driven myself nearly nuts with it. It flies," he said, "and how it flies!" And he lowered his eyes to his glass "Actually, I'm afraid of it."

"What's the Cheetah's wingspan, Jake?" she asked

"Twenty-nine feet," he said and then, curiously, "What's yours?"

"Fifteen four, tip to tip," she smiled, and she stretched them to the ceiling She yawned "Feels good!"

"Do you realize I don't even know what to call you?"
"Call me Bess "

"How will I register you downstairs? Address . . . that sort of thing?"

She smiled gently.

"You do it, Jake. And now you must go I'll find you after a while "

Stewart was on the telephone again when Jake returned. Another girl this time He hung up immediately.

"Now talk!" he said

"Tomorrow I've got to go out to the factory now."

"Tonight, Jake? What for?"

"I've got to think About the Cheetah. And I've got to look at it while I'm doing it "

"Jake, it's no good! That crate has got a hex. I've begged you and threatened you and pleaded with you to give it up You're gonna knock yourself off in that crazy squirt-gun You know they can't get anyone else to fly it How's about forgetting it? I'll get you a date We'll go out and hang one on, like old times How's about it, Bud?"

"Can't. I've got a date with an angel, later on."

Stewart's ruddy face paled a little

"Where is she now?" he demanded. "And *who* and *what* is she?"

Jake looked long at his friend

"She's an angel," he said, "with purple hair, and she's in Room 643 at the Plaza Her name is Bess "

"She's going to stay?" Tom queried sharply

"She can't," Jake's voice was low, "she's gotta go back. She ran away She hasn't got a green pass."

"Back *where*?" The sharp question rang off the walls and the ceiling

"You know where "

The Monarch Aircraft factory lay dark and empty Down past the darkened tool rooms, on out past sub-assembly where the slim hulls of the Cheetahs lay, row on row, on through final assembly to the flight test dock, Jake and the night chief walked, their footsteps echoing from the high metal walls There, in the ghostly light of the night lamps crouched the Cheetah Tiny, she was, and wicked as the wind

THE ANGEL WITH PURPLE HAIR

but there was a soft sheen on her swept-back silver wings and Jake reached out and touched her, ran his hand along her flanks and caressed the sleek nose.

"You can go back to your phone now, Mac," he said. "I want to crawl around her a bit. Think I've got an idea or two."

"Okay, Mr Halloran," the guard replied "If you need anything, use the phone over there in Dispatch," and he walked off into the murky hangar, his heels echoing hollowly on the concrete

And there they were alone Jake Halloran. The Cheetah

Gently he eased back the slim plexiglass hatch and climbed up into the tiny cockpit He settled back and toed the rudder pedals and touched the familiar stub of a control stick With a shudder he remembered the shocking whip of that stick as she broke Mach 9 five days ago Oh, she was fast, the bitch If she could just be tamed He knew, suddenly, the remorse of a quitter He had asked for this rest. Sure, he had wanted to think. But he had been afraid Tired But here, again, was that job to do He couldn't quit now. He knew the design was sound He knew the loving care that had shaped and formed those sleekly beautiful lines He knew the tremendous surging power of the new jet engine there behind his head He knew this ship But where did she get that mean streak? That instinct to kill?

He sat bolt upright in the cockpit Off there in the shadows something had stirred. It moved again Toward him, and the Cheetah And then she moved under the light and she was soft and warm in something grey and flowing and her beautiful hair caught the soft glow of the night lamp

Jake let his head sink back against the shock pad

"I love you," he said And he meant it.

Without a sound or a word she walked to the Cheetah's side Her soft chin came just to the cockpit coaming, and Jake stretched out a hand to touch her cheek.

She smiled

"I love you, Bess," he said again.

She looked at him gravely

"I know you do," she said.

"You know all about me, don't you?"

She nodded

"So what do I do now?" His voice was sharp with desperation

The lovely head leaned down to the satiny skin of the Cheetah

"I don't know, Jake I'll have to find out "

"Find out?" Again the sharpness of despair was in his voice "Find out! From whom?"

The head did not lift, and the voice was a murmur.

"You know perfectly well from whom "

"Bess . . . darling . . . listen to me . . ." But his eager, earnest voice trailed off and the shadows swallowed the echo

There was a long silence Somewhere high up in the ceiling beams a bird twittered nervously, and the Cheetah's elevators clanged softly as Jake let go the control stick and climbed wearily out of the cockpit

"Tomorrow we'll talk about it," she said "Right now we've got things to do Any ideas yet?"

"Nope "

"How does she go, Jake? 'Smatter with her?"

"High speed stall . . . whips to the left Comes up on sonic speed . . . high mach numbers . . . like a nineteen-ten-model coal truck with solid tires on cobblestones."

"How d'you figure it?"

He thought for a minute.

"Bess, I don't *know!* The only thing I'm sure about is that she's trying to kill somebody Me! I've babied this mean little b—thing—and petted it through four major design changes She's basically all right. I know that I've tried everything, except long spins. I haven't spun her yet. Scared to "

"Jake, do you remember the old P-40?"

"Sure I do I've got a lot of time in 'em Why?"

"Do you remember that wing root stall—just off the runway—whip to the left?"

"Sure I remember it But they licked that in a hurry It was just one of those unpredictable things Things happen with all new models "

"How did they lick it, Jake?"

"Why . ." he was deep in thought now "They put a new fillet on the wing root She flew like an angel after that.

Hey!" he said "You mean . . . you mean?" He studied the Cheetah's beautifully faired wing root with eyes that were alight with eagerness

Then, "I know what you mean," he said quietly "Where's that phone?"

He talked earnestly and long with Rogers, the design engineer Yes, the model was still available for wind tunnel tests They could, of course, if he insisted, run some wing-root stall tests tomorrow In ten minutes Rogers was enthusiastic too First thing tomorrow Would he be available for in-flight checks on the prototype?

Jake would be available

He dashed out of the darkened Dispatch office and took her in his arms The wings were a little in the way but she stretched them toward the high ceiling and her lips were warm and they tasted of spring roses

"I love you, Bess!" he said again

"I know," and there was a deep concern in her voice

"Let's not talk about it tomorrow, Bess!" he pleaded
"Let's talk about it now"

"All right," she said. "But I must talk first."

He listened gravely

"The world," she said, "is very large, and you, in spite of what you are about to say, have *not* seen it, nor do you know much of the joy and happiness which can be found here . . . *Shhh!*"

He had been about to interrupt.

"You are very young—twenty-seven years and four months old you are You are capable and strong and intelligent . . . and . . . and charming There should be none of this bitterness in your heart. The world is not right, but you can help to make it right. This little ship, for example, is not right. Tomorrow you will make it right In the years to come you will help to make others right You will fall in love and marry . . . a mortal. You will have a fine, full life I shall see to that. Personally

"But," she continued, "you have seen fit to fall in love with me, because you are . . ." she hesitated, "because you are grateful, I suppose, and because you think me attractive . . . and because, subconsciously, you wish to escape from

this world and what you choose to consider your troubles. They are *my* troubles—you are my trouble”

She looked him full in the eyes

“You’ve given me a lot of trouble, Jake Halloran . . . and now . . . now you’re giving me more You see . . . you see . . .” and the mist was in her eyes “I love you too!”

“That,” she continued firmly, “is not permitted”

And suddenly she was gone into the shadows

Stewart was not in the apartment when he returned to Sutton Place and the loneliness closed in like the cold fog that drifts in from the Sound He wandered aimlessly about the apartment for a while, found a half empty bottle of Scotch in the kitchen, put it back, and finally, a while after midnight, called Room 643 at the Plaza. There was no answer

He called again at two in the morning Still no answer. Stewart came in at four, and finally, just as the sky out over the river began to fade into grey, he fell asleep At eight-thirty the telephone rang, and it was Rogers He had already made one run in the tunnel It was the wing root It was the wing root beyond question How about an in-flight test on the prototype at eleven? High speed turning stalls? Jake said that he would be there at ten-thirty, and hung up Then he called 643 at the Plaza There was no answer.

He could hardly have expected her to answer. She was standing there as he put the telephone slowly back on its cradle She was standing there looking into his eyes as he turned

“Hi!” she said, softly. “Going flying?”

For a long, long time he looked into her eyes and then they went a little misty again and she dropped them and she was intently examining the tip of a silver slipper that was digging into the carpet

“I love you,” he said.

“I know, Jake I know!”

“Stay here with me!” he said, and there was urgency and loneliness and heartache in his voice

She raised her eyes to his own and the mist was still there

“I can’t,” she whispered “I love you . . . and I can’t,” and then she was suddenly in his arms.

At thirty thousand he leveled the Cheetah out of its thrusting surging climb and the sound of the slipstream rose in pitch and volume to the old familiar, terrifying whine. The roaring of the jet behind him was lost to his ears. Only the slipstream. The control stick stiffened and bucked in his hand. That was familiar too. But today it didn't matter. This business was about licked. Three tight turns left. Three right. About eight G's. Then he would have it. Then Rogers could go ahead on that new wing root.

He called back to the tower, somewhere back in the hazy spit of land that was Long Island. "Thirty thousand . . . outside air minus one five . . . Mach seven . . . slight aileron ripples . . . buffeting her elevators again . . ." and as he swept into the first turn the G suit swelled and bit into his thighs and his armpits. "Seven and a half." And then he shook his head to clear his eyes and squeezed her to the right, pulling her tighter and tighter and a grey-black curtain streaked with red closed down and he could barely read the accelerometer. "Nine. . . ." and then he nosed her down and the pitch of her slipstream whine screamed into a high soprano, now left . . . and then she whipped . . . and he had it. Had it! Cold, dead and certain. And he called the tower and Rogers who was waiting there took the mike for a minute and then went scuttling down to the big drawing board in his office.

He didn't tell the tower he was going to spin it. Long, to the left. Four turns. He didn't even know he was going to do it himself. But he did. Something told him to. Rogers would want to know. And besides, it was his day, his hour, and it was the least he could do. The least he could do.

The Cheetah arched up and out and as the high-pitched whine faded to a whisper he called in.

The tower called the front office on the interphone. Almost before the Cheetah shuddered off into her whipping, dizzy spiral they were pouring out onto the flight ramp, dozens and hundreds of them who loved Jake Halloran and the Cheetah. They saw the speck come whistling down and they knew, most of them, that it would never come out. Jake Halloran had known it after the first two turns.

He didn't try to get out with his 'chute. It was probably because he knew, somehow, that that was the way it had to be.

It was because he knew, suddenly, why he had had to spin the ship, and because he knew, now, why it wouldn't come out. It was the only thing that she could have done. He knew that too.

He called the tower again. "Nineteen thousand . . . seven counted turns . . . no aileron response. She spins flat—four tries at recovery—tell Rogers she needs a tail 'chute." And there was no answer. ". . . Tower—do you read?" And the tower knew that Halloran was riding her in.

The purple head was bowed in her hands and the voice that belonged to the wind was a desperate whisper "Is this what you want, Jake—is this what you will have? Get out now, Jake. Quickly. Go out the left side. . . go out on the inside of the spin, Jake—you know how . . . quickly . . . quickly I'll watch over you, darling! I'll show you . . . Quickly, my darling! Now!"—And Jake Halloran heard, and he smiled and the Cheetah struck.

F. Marion Crawford

For the Blood Is the Life

We had dined at sunset on the broad roof of the old tower, because it was cooler there during the great heat of summer. Besides, the little kitchen was built at one corner of the great square platform, which made it more convenient than if the dishes had to be carried down the steep stone steps, broken in places and everywhere worn with age. The tower was one of those built all down the west coast of Calabria by the Emperor Charles V early in the sixteenth century, to keep off the Barbary pirates, when the unbelievers were allied with Francis I against the Emperor and the Church. They have gone to ruin, a few still stand intact, and mine is one of the largest. How it came into my possession ten years ago, and why I spend a part of each year in it, are matters which do not concern this tale. The tower stands in one of the loneliest spots in Southern Italy, at the extremity of a curving rocky promontory, which forms a small but safe natural harbour at the southern extremity of the Gulf of Policastro, and just north of Cape Scalea, the birthplace of Judas Iscariot, according to the old local legend. The tower stands alone on this hooked spur of the rock, and there is not a house to be seen within three miles of it. When I go there I take a couple of sailors, one of whom is a fair cook, and when I am away it is in charge of a gnome-like little being who was once a miner and who attached himself to me long ago.

My friend, who sometimes visits me in my summer solitude, is an artist by profession, a Scandinavian by birth, and a cosmopolitan by force of circumstances. We had dined at sunset, the sunset glow had reddened and faded again, and the evening purple steeped the vast chain of the mountains that embrace the deep gulf to eastward and rear themselves higher and higher toward the south. It was hot, and we sat at the landward corner of the platform, waiting for the night breeze to come down from the lower hills. The colour sank

out of the air, there was a little interval of deep-grey twilight, and a lamp sent a yellow streak from the open door of the kitchen, where the men were getting their supper

Then the moon rose suddenly above the crest of the promontory, flooding the platform and lighting up every little spur of rock and knoll of grass below us, down to the edge of the motionless water My friend lighted his pipe and sat looking at a spot on the hillside I knew that he was looking at it, and for a long time past I had wondered whether he would ever see anything there that would fix his attention. I knew that spot well It was clear that he was interested at last, though it was a long time before he spoke Like most painters, he trusts to his own eyesight, as a lion trusts his strength and a stag his speed, and he is always disturbed when he cannot reconcile what he sees with what he believes that he ought to see

"It's strange," he said "Do you see that little mound just on this side of the boulder?"

"Yes," I said, and I guessed what was coming.

"It looks like a grave," observed Holger

"Very true It does look like a grave "

"Yes," continued my friend, his eyes still fixed on the spot. "But the strange thing is that I see the body lying on the top of it. Of course," continued Holger, turning his head on one side as artists do, "it must be an effect of light In the first place, it is not a grave at all Secondly, if it were, the body would be inside and not outside Therefore, it's an effect of the moonlight. Don't you see it?"

"Perfectly, I always see it on moonlight nights "

"It doesn't seem to interest you much," said Holger.

"On the contrary, it does interest me, though I am used to it You're not so far wrong, either The mound is really a grave "

"Nonsense!" cried Holger, incredulously "I suppose you'll tell me what I see lying on it is really a corpse!"

"No," I answered, "it's not I know, because I have taken the trouble to go down and see "

"Then what is it?" asked Holger.

"It's nothing "

"You mean that it's an effect of light, I suppose?"

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"It's nothing."

"You mean that it's an effect of light, I suppose?"

"Perhaps it is But the inexplicable part of the matter is that it makes no difference whether the moon is rising or setting, or waxing or waning If there's any moonlight at all, from east or west or overhead, so long as it shines on the grave you can see the outline of the body on top "

Holger stirred up his pipe with the point of his knife, and then used his finger for a stopper When the tobacco burned well he rose from his chair

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'll go down and take a look at it."

He left me, crossed the roof, and disappeared down the dark steps I did not move, but sat looking down until he came out of the tower below I heard him humming an old Danish song as he crossed the open space in the bright moonlight, going straight to the mysterious mound When he was ten paces from it, Holger stopped short, made two steps forward, and then three or four backward, and then stopped again I know what that meant He had reached the spot where the Thing ceased to be visible—where, as he would have said, the effect of light changed

Then he went on till he reached the mound and stood upon it I could see the Thing still, but it was no longer lying down, it was on its knees now, winding its white arms round Holger's body and looking up into his face A cool breeze stirred my hair at that moment, as the night wind began to come down from the hills, but it felt like a breath from another world

The Thing seemed to be trying to climb to its feet, helping itself up by Holger's body while he stood upright, quite unconscious of it and apparently looking toward the tower, which is very picturesque when the moonlight falls upon it on that side

"Come along!" I shouted "Don't stay there all night!"

It seemed to me that he moved reluctantly as he stepped from the mound, or else with difficulty That was it. The Thing's arms were still round his waist, but its feet could not leave the grave As he came slowly forward it was drawn and lengthened like a wreath of mist, thin and white, till I saw distinctly that Holger shook himself, as a man does who feels a chill At the same instant a little wail of pain came to me on

the breeze—it might have been the cry of the small owl that lives among the rocks—and the misty presence floated swiftly back from Holger's advancing figure and lay once more at its length upon the mound

Again I felt the cool breeze in my hair, and this time an icy thrill of dread ran down my spine I remembered very well that I had once gone down there alone in the moonlight; that presently, being near, I had seen nothing, that, like Holger, I had gone and had stood upon the mound, and I remembered how, when I came back, sure that there was nothing there, I had felt the sudden conviction that there was something after all if I would only look behind me I remembered the strong temptation to look back, a temptation I had resisted as unworthy of a man of sense, until, to get rid of it, I had shaken myself just as Holger did

And now I knew that those white, misty arms had been round me too, I knew it in a flash, and I shuddered as I remembered that I had heard the night owl then too But it had not been the night owl It was the cry of the Thing

I refilled my pipe and poured out a cup of strong southern wine, in less than a minute Holger was seated beside me again.

"Of course there's nothing there," he said, "but it's creepy, all the same Do you know, when I was coming back I was so sure that there was something behind me that I wanted to turn round and look? It was an effort not to"

He laughed a little, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and poured himself out some wine For a while neither of us spoke, and the moon rose higher, and we both looked at the Thing that lay on the mound

"You might make a story about that," said Holger after a long time

"There is one," I answered. "If you're not sleepy, I'll tell it to you "

"Go ahead," said Holger, who likes stories.

Old Alario was dying up there in the village behind the hill You remember him, I have no doubt They say that he made his money by selling sham jewellery in South Africa, and escaped with his gains when he was found out. Like all those

fellows, if they bring anything back with them, he at once set to work to enlarge his house, and as there are no masons here, he sent all the way to Paola for two workmen. They were a rough-looking pair of scoundrels—a Neapolitan who had lost one eye and a Sicilian with an old scar half an inch deep across his left cheek. I often saw them, for on Sundays they used to come down here and fish off the rocks. When Alario caught the fever that killed him the masons were still at work. As he had agreed that part of their pay should be their board and lodging, he made them sleep in the house. His wife was dead, and he had an only son called Angelo, who was a much better sort than himself. Angelo was to marry the daughter of the richest man in the village, and, strange to say, though their marriage was arranged by their parents, the young people were said to be in love with each other.

For that matter, the whole village was in love with Angelo, and among the rest a wild, good-looking creature called Cristina, who was more like a gipsy than any girl I ever saw about here. She had very red lips and very black eyes, she was built like a greyhound, and had the tongue of the devil. But Angelo did not care a straw for her. He was rather a simple-minded fellow, quite different from his old scoundrel of a father, and under what I should call normal circumstances I really believe that he would never have looked at any girl except the nice plump little creature, with a fat dowry, whom his father meant him to marry. But things turned up which were neither normal nor natural.

On the other hand, a very handsome young shepherd from the hills above Maratea was in love with Cristina, who seems to have been quite indifferent to him. Cristina had no regular means of subsistence, but she was a good girl and willing to do any work or go on errands to any distance for the sake of a loaf of bread or a mess of beans, and permission to sleep under cover. She was especially glad when she could get something to do about the house of Angelo's father. There is no doctor in the village, and when the neighbours saw that old Alario was dying they sent Cristina to Scalea to fetch one. That was late in the afternoon, and if they had waited so long, it was because the dying miser refused to allow any

such extravagance while he was able to speak. But while Cristina was gone matters grew rapidly worse, the priest was brought to the bedside, and when he had done what he could he gave it as his opinion to the bystanders that the old man was dead, and left the house.

You know these people. They have a physical horror of death. Until the priest spoke, the room had been full of people. The words were hardly out of his mouth before it was empty. It was night now. They hurried down the dark steps and out into the street.

Angelo, as I have said, was away, Cristina had not come back—the simple woman-servant who had nursed the sick man fled with the rest, and the body was left alone in the flickering light of the earthen oil lamp.

Five minutes later two men looked in cautiously and crept forward toward the bed. They were the one-eyed Neapolitan mason and his Sicilian companion. They knew what they wanted. In a moment they had dragged from under the bed a small but heavy iron-bound box, and long before any one thought of coming back to the dead man they had left the house and the village under cover of the darkness. It was easy enough, for Alario's house is the last toward the gorge which leads down here, and the thieves merely went out by the back door, got over the stone wall, and had nothing to risk after that except the possibility of meeting some belated countryman, which was very small indeed, since few of the people use that path. They had a mattock and shovel, and they made their way here without accident.

I am telling you this story as it must have happened, for, of course, there were no witnesses to this part of it. The men brought the box down by the gorge, intending to bury it until they should be able to come back and take it away in a boat. They must have been clever enough to guess that some of the money would be in paper notes, for they would otherwise have buried it on the beach in the wet sand, where it would have been much safer. But the paper would have rotted if they had been obliged to leave it there long, so they dug their hole down there, close to that boulder. Yes, just where the mound is now.

Cristina did not find the doctor in Scalea, for he had been

sent for from a place up the valley, halfway to San Domenico. If she had found him, he would have come on his mule by the upper road, which is smoother but much longer. But Cristina took the short cut by the rocks, which passes about fifty feet above the mound, and goes round that corner. The men were digging when she passed, and she heard them at work. It would not have been like her to go by without finding out what the noise was, for she was never afraid of anything in her life, and, besides, the fishermen sometimes come ashore here at night to get a stone for an anchor or to gather sticks to make a little fire. The night was dark, and Cristina probably came close to the two men before she could see what they were doing. She knew them, of course, and they knew her, and understood instantly that they were in her power. There was only one thing to be done for their safety, and they did it. They knocked her on the head, they dug the hole deep, and they buried her quickly with the iron-bound chest. They must have understood that their only chance of escaping suspicion lay in getting back to the village before their absence was noticed, for they returned immediately, and were found half an hour later gossiping quietly with the man who was making Alario's coffin. He was a crony of theirs, and had been working at the repairs in the old man's house. So far as I have been able to make out, the only persons who were supposed to know where Alario kept his treasure were Angelo and the one woman-servant I have mentioned. Angelo was away, it was the woman who discovered the theft.

It is easy enough to understand why no one else knew where the money was. The old man kept his door locked and the key in his pocket when he was out, and did not let the woman enter to clean the place unless he was there himself. The whole village knew that he had money somewhere, however, and the masons had probably discovered the whereabouts of the chest by climbing in at the window in his absence. If the old man had not been delirious until he lost consciousness, he would have been in frightful agony of mind for his riches. The faithful woman-servant forgot their existence only for a few moments when she fled with the rest, overcome by the horror of death. Twenty minutes had not passed before she returned with the two hideous old hags who are always called

in to prepare the dead for burial Even then she had not at first the courage to go near the bed with them, but she made a pretence of dropping something, went down on her knees as if to find it, and looked under the bedstead The walls of the room were newly whitewashed down to the floor, and she saw at a glance that the chest was gone It had been there in the afternoon, it had therefore been stolen in the short interval since she had left the room

There are no carabineers stationed in the village, there is not so much as a municipal watchman, for there is no municipality There never was such a place, I believe Scalea is supposed to look after it in some mysterious way, and it takes a couple of hours to get anybody from there As the old woman had lived in the village all her life, it did not even occur to her to apply to any civil authority for help She simply set up a howl and ran through the village in the dark, screaming out that her dead master's house had been robbed Many of the people looked out, but at first no one seemed inclined to help her Most of them, judging her by themselves, whispered to each other that she had probably stolen the money herself The first man to move was the father of the girl whom Angelo was to marry, having collected his household, all of whom felt a personal interest in the wealth which was to have come into the family, he declared it to be his opinion that the chest had been stolen by the two journeyman masons who lodged in the house He headed a search for them, which naturally began in Alario's house and ended in the carpenter's workshop, where the thieves were found discussing a measure of wine with the carpenter over the half-finished coffin, by the light of one earthen lamp filled with oil and tallow The search party at once accused the delinquents of the crime, and threatened to lock them up in the cellar till the carabineers could be fetched from Scalea The two men looked at each other for one moment, and then without the slightest hesitation they put out the single light, seized the unfinished coffin between them, and using it as a sort of battering ram, dashed upon their assailants in the dark In a few moments they were beyond pursuit.

That is the end of the first part of the story The treasure had disappeared, and as no trace of it could be found the

people naturally supposed that the thieves had succeeded in carrying it off. The old man was buried, and when Angelo came back at last he had to borrow money to pay for the miserable funeral, and had some difficulty in doing so. He hardly needed to be told that in losing his inheritance he had lost his bride. In this part of the world marriages are made on strictly business principles, and if the promised cash is not forthcoming on the appointed day the bride or the bridegroom whose parents have failed to produce it may as well take themselves off, for there will be no wedding. Poor Angelo knew that well enough. His father had been possessed of hardly any land, and now that the hard cash which he had brought from South America was gone, there was nothing left but debts for the building materials that were to have been used for enlarging and improving the old house. Angelo was beggared, and the nice plump little creature who was to have been his turned up her nose at him in the most approved fashion. As for Cristina, it was several days before she was missed, for no one remembered that she had been sent to Scalea for the doctor, who had never come. She often disappeared in the same way for days together, when she could find a little work here and there at the distant farms among the hills. But when she did not come back at all, people began to wonder, and at last made up their minds that she had connived with the masons and had escaped with them.

I paused and emptied my glass

"That sort of thing could not happen anywhere else," observed Holger, filling his everlasting pipe again. "It is wonderful what a natural charm there is about murder and sudden death in a romantic country like this. Deeds that would be simply brutal and disgusting anywhere else become dramatic and mysterious because this is Italy and we are living in a genuine tower of Charles V built against genuine Barbary pirates."

"There's something in that," I admitted. Holger is the most romantic man in the world inside of himself, but he always thinks it necessary to explain why he feels anything.

"I suppose they found the poor girl's body with the box," he said presently.

"As it seems to interest you," I answered, "I'll tell you the rest of the story."

The moon had risen high by this time, the outline of the Thing on the mound was clearer to our eyes than before.

The village very soon settled down to its small, dull life. No one missed old Alario, who had been away so much on his voyages to South America that he had never been a familiar figure in his native place. Angelo lived in the half-finished house, and because he had no money to pay the old woman-servant she would not stay with him, but once in a long time she would come and wash a shirt for him for old acquaintance's sake. Besides the house, he had inherited a small patch of ground at some distance from the village, he tried to cultivate it, but he had no heart in the work, for he knew he could never pay the taxes on it and on the house, which would certainly be confiscated by the Government, or seized for the debt of the building material, which the man who had supplied it refused to take back.

Angelo was very unhappy. So long as his father had been alive and rich, every girl in the village had been in love with him, but that was all changed now. It had been pleasant to be admired and courted, and invited to drink wine by fathers who had girls to marry. It was hard to be stared at coldly, and sometimes laughed at because he had been robbed of his inheritance. He cooked his miserable meals for himself, and from being sad became melancholy and morose.

At twilight, when the day's work was done, instead of hanging about in the open space before the church with young fellows of his own age, he took to wandering in lonely places on the outskirts of the village till it was quite dark. Then he slunk home and went to bed to save the expense of a light. But in those lonely twilight hours he began to have strange waking dreams. He was not always alone, for often when he sat on the stump of a tree, where the narrow path turns down the gorge, he was sure that a woman came up noiselessly over the rough stones, as if her feet were bare, and she stood under a clump of chestnut trees only half a dozen yards down the path, and beckoned to him without speaking. Though she was in the shadow he knew that her lips were red, and that

when they parted a little and smiled at him she showed two small sharp teeth He knew this at first rather than saw it, and he knew that it was Cristina, and that she was dead Yet he was not afraid, he only wondered whether it was a dream, for he thought that if he had been awake he should have been frightened

Besides, the dead woman had red lips, and that could only happen in a dream Whenever he went near the gorge after sunset she was already there waiting for him, or else she very soon appeared, and he began to be sure that she came a little nearer to him every day At first he had only been sure of her blood-red mouth, but now each feature grew distinct, and the pale face looked at him with deep and hungry eyes

It was the eyes that grew dim Little by little he came to know that some day the dream would not end when he turned away to go home, but would lead him down the gorge out of which the vision rose She was nearer now when she beckoned to him Her cheeks were not livid like those of the dead, but pale with starvation, with the furious and unappeased physical hunger of her eyes that devoured him They feasted on his soul and cast a spell over him, and at last they were close to his own and held him He could not tell whether her breath was as hot as fire or as cold as ice, he could not tell whether her red lips burned his or froze them, or whether her five fingers on his wrist seared scorching scars or bit his flesh like frost, he could not tell whether he was awake or asleep, whether she was alive or dead, but he knew that she loved him, she alone of all creatures, earthly or unearthly, and her spell had power over him.

When the moon rose high that night the shadow of that Thing was not alone down there upon the mound

Angelo awoke in the cool dawn, drenched with dew and chilled through flesh, and blood, and bone He opened his eyes to the faint grey light, and saw the stars still shining overhead He was very weak, and his heart was beating so slowly that he was almost like a man fainting Slowly he turned his head on the mound, as on a pillow, but the other face was not there Fear seized him suddenly, a fear unspeakable and unknown, he sprang to his feet and fled up the gorge, and he never looked behind him until he reached the door of the

house on the outskirts of the village Drearly he went to his work that day, and wearily the hours dragged themselves after the sun, till at last it touched the sea and sank, and the great sharp hills above Maratea turned purple against the dove-coloured eastern sky

Angelo shouldered his heavy hoe and left the field He felt less tired now than in the morning when he had begun to work, but he promised himself that he would go home without lingering by the gorge, and eat the best supper he could get himself, and sleep all night in his bed like a Christian man Not again would he be tempted down the narrow way by a shadow with red lips and icy breath; not again would he dream that dream of terror and delight He was near the village now, it was half an hour since the sun had set, and the cracked church bell sent little discordant echoes across the rocks and ravines to tell all good people that the day was done Angelo stood still a moment where the path forked, where it led toward the village on the left, and down to the gorge on the right, where a clump of chestnut trees overhung the narrow way He stood still a minute, lifting his battered hat from his head and gazing at the fast-fading sea westward, and his lips moved as he silently repeated the familiar evening prayer His lips moved, but the words that followed them in his brain lost their meaning and turned into others, and ended in a name that he spoke aloud—Cristina! With the name, the tension of his will relaxed suddenly, reality went out and the dream took him again, and bore him on swiftly and surely like a man walking in his sleep, down, down, by the steep path in the gathering darkness And as she glided beside him, Cristina whispered strange, sweet things in his ear, which somehow, if he had been awake, he knew that he could not quite have understood, but now they were the most wonderful words he had ever heard in his life And she kissed him also, but not upon his mouth He felt her sharp kisses upon his white throat, and he knew that her lips were red So the wild dream sped on through twilight and darkness and moonrise, and all the glory of the summer's night But in the chilly dawn he lay as one half dead upon the mound down there, recalling and not recalling, drained of his blood, yet strangely longing to give those red lips more Then

came the fear, the awful nameless panic, the mortal horror that guards the confines of the world we see not, neither know of as we know of other things, but which we feel when its icy chill freezes our bones and stirs our hair with the touch of a ghostly hand Once more Angelo sprang from the mound and fled up the gorge in the breaking day, but his step was less sure this time, and he panted for breath as he ran, and when he came to the bright spring of water that rises halfway up the hillside, he dropped upon his knees and hands and plunged his whole face in and drank as he had never drunk before—for it was the thirst of the wounded man who has lain bleeding all night long upon the battle-field

She had him fast now, and he could not escape her, but would come to her every evening at dusk until she had drained him of his last drop of blood It was in vain that when the day was done he tried to take another turning and to go home by a path that did not lead near the gorge It was in vain that he made promises to himself each morning at dawn when he climbed the lonely way up from the shore to the village It was all in vain, for when the sun sank burning into the sea, and the coolness of the evening stole out as from a hiding-place to delight the weary world, his feet turned toward the old way, and she was waiting for him in the shadow under the chestnut trees, and then all happened as before, and she fell to kissing his white throat even as she flitted lightly down the way, winding one arm about him And as his blood failed, she grew more hungry and more thirsty every day, and every day when he awoke in the early dawn it was harder to rouse himself to the effort of climbing the steep path to the village, and when he went to his work his feet dragged painfully, and there was hardly strength in his arms to wield the heavy hoe He scarcely spoke to any one now, but the people said he was "consuming himself" for love of the girl he was to have married when he lost his inheritance, and they laughed heartily at the thought, for this is not a very romantic country At this time, Antonio, the man who stays here to look after the tower, returned from a visit to his people, who live near Salerno He had been away all the time since before Alario's death and knew nothing of what had happened He has told me that he came back late in the afternoon and shut himself up in the

tower to eat and sleep, for he was very tired. It was past midnight when he awoke, and when he looked out the waning moon was rising over the shoulder of the hill. He looked out toward the mound, and he saw something, and he did not sleep again that night. When he went out again in the morning it was broad daylight, and there was nothing to be seen on the mound but loose stones and driven sand. Yet he did not go very near it, he went straight up the path to the village and directly to the house of the old priest.

"I have seen an evil thing this night," he said, "I have seen how the dead drink the blood of the living. And the blood is the life."

"Tell me what you have seen," said the priest in reply. Antonio told him everything he had seen.

"You must bring your book and your holy water to-night," he added. "I will be here before sunset to go down with you, and if it pleases your reverence to sup with me while we wait, I will make ready."

"I will come," the priest answered, "for I have read in old books of these strange beings which are neither quick nor dead, and which lie ever fresh in their graves, stealing out in the dusk to taste life and blood."

Antonio cannot read, but he was glad to see that the priest understood the business, for, of course, the books must have instructed him as to the best means of quieting the half-living Thing for ever.

So Antonio went away to his work, which consists largely in sitting on the shady side of the tower, when he is not perched upon a rock with a fishing-line catching nothing. But on that day he went twice to look at the mound in the bright sunlight, and he searched round and round it for some hole through which the being might get in and out, but he found none. When the sun began to sink and the air was cooler in the shadows, he went up to fetch the old priest, carrying a little wicker basket with him; and in this they placed a bottle of holy water, and the basin, and sprinkler, and the stole which the priest would need, and they came down and waited in the door of the tower till it should be dark. But while the light still lingered very grey and faint, they saw something moving, just there, two figures, a man's that

walked, and a woman's that flitted beside him, and while her head lay on his shoulder she kissed his throat The priest has told me that, too, and that his teeth chattered and he grasped Antonio's arm The vision passed and disappeared into the shadow Then Antonio got the leather flask of strong liquor, which he kept for great occasions, and poured such a draught as made the old man feel almost young again, and he got the lantern, and his pick and shovel, and gave the priest his stole to put on and the holy water to carry, and they went out together toward the spot where the work was to be done Antonio says that in spite of the rum his own knees shook together, and the priest stumbled over his Latin For when they were yet a few yards from the mound the flickering light of the lantern fell upon Angelo's white face, unconscious as if in sleep, and on his upturned throat, over which a very thin red line of blood trickled down into his collar, and the flickering light of the lantern played upon another face that looked up from the feast—upon two deep, dead eyes that saw in spite of death—upon parted lips redder than life itself—upon two gleaming teeth on which glistened a rosy drop Then the priest, good old man, shut his eyes tight and showered holy water before him, and his cracked voice rose almost to a scream, and then Antonio, who is no coward after all, raised his pick in one hand and the lantern in the other, as he sprang forward, not knowing what the end should be, and then he swears that he heard a woman's cry, and the Thing was gone, and Angelo lay alone on the mound unconscious, with the red line on his throat and the beads of deathly sweat on his cold forehead They lifted him, half-dead as he was, and laid him on the ground close by, and then Antonio went to work, and the priest helped him, though he was old and could not do much, and they dug deep, and at last Antonio, standing in the grave, stooped down with his lantern to see what he might see

His hair used to be dark brown, with grizzled streaks about the temples, in less than a month from that day he was as grey as a badger He was a miner when he was young, and most of these fellows have seen ugly sights now and then, when accidents have happened, but he had never seen what he saw that night—that Thing which is neither alive nor dead,

that Thing that will abide neither above ground nor in the grave Antonio had brought something with him which the priest had not noticed He had made it that afternoon—a sharp stake shaped from a piece of tough old driftwood He had it with him now, and he had his heavy pick, and he had taken the lantern down into the grave I don't think any power on earth could make him speak of what happened then, and the old priest was too frightened to look in He says he heard Antonio breathing like a wild beast, and moving as if he were fighting with something almost as strong as himself, and he heard an evil sound also, with blows, as of something violently driven through flesh and bone, and then the most awful sound of all—a woman's shriek, the unearthly scream of a woman neither dead nor alive, but buried deep for many days And he, the poor old priest, could only rock himself as he knelt there in the sand, crying aloud his prayers and exorcisms to drown these dreadful sounds Then suddenly a small iron-bound chest was thrown up and rolled over against the old man's knee, and in a moment more Antonio was beside him, his face as white as tallow in the flickering light of the lantern, shovelling the sand and pebbles into the grave with furious haste, and looking over the edge till the pit was half full, and the priest said that there was much fresh blood on Antonio's hands and on his clothes

I had come to the end of my story Holger finished his wine and leaned back in his chair

"So Angelo got his own again," he said "Did he marry the prim and plump young person to whom he had been betrothed?"

"No, he had been badly frightened. He went to South America, and has not been heard of since "

"And that poor thing's body is there still, I suppose," said Holger. "Is it quite dead yet, I wonder?"

I wonder, too But whether it be dead or alive, I should hardly care to see it, even in broad daylight Antonio is as grey as a badger, and he has never been quite the same man since that night.

Richard Hughes

The Stranger

I

The street in Cylfant was so steep that if you took a middling jump from the top of the village you would not touch ground again till you reached the bottom but you would probably hurt yourself The houses sat each on other's left shoulder, all the way up, so that the smoke from Mrs Grocery-Jones' chimney blew in at Mrs Boot-Jones' basement, and out through her top windows into the cellar of the Post Office, and out through the Post Office Daughter's little bedroom casement into that of the Butchery Aunt (who was paralysed and lived downstairs) and so on, up the whole line like a flue, till it left soot on the stomachs of the sheep grazing on the hillside above

But that does not explain why the Stranger came to Cylfant village, unless it was through curiosity nor, indeed, what he was doing in such a Sabbath-keeping little Anabaptist hamlet at all, where he might have known he would meet with an accident nor what he was doing so far from home

Mr Williams was the rector of Cylfant, and perhaps thirty miles round such an old fat man that he had difficulty in walking between his different churches on Sundays His face was heavy, his eyes small but with a dream in them, and he kept sticky sweet things ready in his pocket. He was stone-deaf, so that now he roared like a bull, now whispered like a young lover He might be heard roaring across a valley He had one black suit, with patches on it, and one surplice, that he darned sometimes He lived by letting the rectory in the summer and when the Disestablishment Bill wiped away his stipend of eight pounds a year, he made up for it by taking in laundry you would see him in front of the rectory, legs set well apart, both heavy arms plunged up to the elbows in suds,

a towel pinned to both shoulders to save his black coat, roaring a greeting to all who might pass

Cylfant was very proud of the smallness of his congregation for in Wales to have many churchpeople in a village is a great disgrace. They are always the scallywags, the folk who have been expelled from their chapels; and who hope, even if they cannot expect heaven, that things will not be quite so uncomfortable for them in the next world as if they gave up religion altogether. There were only three families, except for the Squire's governess, that ever came to Cylfant church. Mr. Williams hated verse, but he preached them pure poetry. he had such an imagination that if he meditated on the anatomy of angels there seemed to be strange flying things about his head, and the passionate roaring and whispering of his voice could hang Christ even on the polished brass altar-cross

Presently he married the girl who played the harmonium: but she had one leg

It was she, Minnie, that took in the Stranger. They were sitting one night in the rectory parlour, and Mr. Williams was reading a book of sermons with great fixity of mind, in order to forget his Loss for that day the little ring on his watch-chain had opened, and he had lost the gold cross that he had always carried. Minnie was sure that it had been there when they started to climb the village but they had no lantern the wind was a fleet howling darkness, so they could not search till the morning, even if it lay on their very doorstep. Mr. Williams read three sermons at a gulp, and closed the book. It was always a thing of amazement that a man who read such dull sermons with such avidity could put so much thrill and beauty, so little of the moralities, into his own preaching

He shut the book, and, giving a great sigh, puffed out his cheeks, while he squinted along the broad shirt-front under his chin. Minnie went to turn down the lamp—as she always did, for reasons of thrift, when her husband was not actually reading, and all at once she heard a cry in the night, sharp as a child's, and full of terror and innocence. She opened the door, and saw a small huddled figure in the roadway. There

was a little light shining from it, bluish and fitful and she knew at once it was something more than natural She set her wooden leg firmly against the doorstep, and, bending down, caught the Stranger up in her arms, and lifted him over the threshold He lay there, blinking in the lamplight a grotesque thing, with misshapen ears and a broad, flat nose His limbs were knotted, but the skin at his joints was yellow and delicate as a snake's belly He had crumpled wings, as fine as petrol upon water even thus battered, their beauty could not but be seen He seemed in pain and there was a small cross-shaped weal burnt on his side, as if he had stumbled on a little red-hot iron

"Poor little thing," said Mr Williams, looking at it sideways from his chair "What is it?"

"It is more ugly than anything I have ever seen," said Minnie "Perhaps it is an angel for it was never born of woman"

"We should be more humble, Minnie," said her husband "Who are we that God should send His angels to try us?"

"At any rate, I think it is not," said Minnie "We will see"

She took up the book of sermons, and touched him on the forehead with it He gave a shrill yell of pain

"God forgive me for my cruelty," she exclaimed "It must be a—"

"It is a Stranger," said Mr Williams quickly

Minnie turned and looked at him

"What shall we do?" she shouted in his ear "For if we harbour it we shall surely be damned We must not help God's enemies"

"We are taught to love our enemies," whispered Mr Williams "And who is God's enemy is ours too"

"But it can feel no gratitude," said Minnie "It will return us evil for good"

"If we do good in the hope of gratitude we have our reward," roared Mr Williams

"You mean you will keep him?" said Minnie

"I mean"—the old man groaned—"I do not know what to do, indeed, whatever"

But the visitor settled that question for them himself He

crawled over to the fireplace, and sitting himself on one of the reddest coals, smiled out at them with a grin that stretched from ear to ear.

II

That was how the little devil came to Cylfant rectory. He had great natural charm, and when the cross-shaped weal on his side was better—for it healed quickly under the action of fire—his spirits returned to him. One was led to forget the grotesque beauty of his form by the generous amiability of his expression. He took to the old rector at once, and Mr. Williams himself could not but feel a secret liking for him. That night he followed them up to bed. Mr. Williams had to shut and lock the bedroom door on him. But hardly were they inside when they saw a bluish light on the panel: and presently the little devil was sitting perched upon the bed-rail, watching with a sober interest Minnie unstrap her wooden leg and even when she said her prayers—which she did in a shamefast fashion, for fear of giving him pain—he showed no embarrassment whatever. When they were both fast asleep, he took down Minnie's old peg from the shelf where she had laid it, and did something to it in the corner. He then lay down in a pool of moonlight, and was still sleeping soundly when the rector heaved himself out of bed in the morning. The old man woke Minnie, who scrambled out of bed, and began to strap on her leg preparatory to getting the breakfast but a wonderful thing happened, for no sooner had she fitted her scarred stump into the leather socket than the leather changed to flesh, and the wood to flesh, and there she was with the most elegant and seductive leg that ever troubled a man's eye and, moreover, there was a silk stocking on it, and a high-heeled Paris shoe on it, before she could recover from her surprise. As she drew on her old ringed black-and-white cotton oddment over the other stocky red ankle she thought that never had such a pair of legs been seen together on one body. She looked round in a guilty fashion but her husband was balanced in front of the looking-glass shaving himself. He had not seen. She pulled on her

dress all in a hurry and danced away downstairs. She let up the blinds and swept the floor, and all the time her new leg behaved as well as if she had known it all her life but directly she flung open the front door to shake the mat, it began all at once to drag, and jib she got pins and needles in it it jumped and kicked like a thing quite out of control And she saw the reason for there in the roadway, where she had found the Stranger the night before, was the rector's gold cross

"There is no mistaking," said Minnie to herself, "where that leg came from"

And, indeed, there was not She sidled up to the cross with difficulty, and recovered it and all at once heard steps on the cobbles It was Scraggy Evan, the postman Minnie's first thought was to hide the leg, for it would take some explaining away But it would not be hidden the shameless thing thrust the delicate turn of its ankle right under Scraggy Evan's nose Scraggy's cheery "bore da!" was lost in a gasp, and poor Minnie fled into the house scarlet with shame, the damnable leg giving coquettish little kicks into the air as she went.

What Scraggy told the village we can only guess but he must have told them something, or why should Mrs Williams have received so many callers that morning? The first came when breakfast was hardly over and the Stranger was sitting quietly on the hob picking his teeth with his tail. Minnie had great presence of mind She ran to her wood-box, and taking from it a red-flannel petticoat that she had been mending, wrapped the Stranger in it and crammed him quickly into a wooden box, begging him in a staccato whisper to lie still Upon the face of Mr Williams there was a look of much courage and resignation Devil or no, he was prepared to justify his guest to all comers Minnie opened the door, and Mrs Grocery-Jones stood there

"Good morning," said she "I was calling to ask if you are driving over to Ynysilanbedrbachdeudraethgerylan today."

She paused and sniffed, then sniffed again

There was no doubt of it somewhere sulphur was burning

"We are not," said Minnie "We are too busy here, in-

deed, with the plaguey wasps. Mr Williams has hardly smoked out one nest, but bad are they as they were before, indeed "

Mrs Jones gave a gasp of surprise.

"Wasps in the winter-time?" she said.

"I did not say *wasps*," said Minnie, "I said the *wall-paper*, which the doctor thinks may have the scarlet-fever lurking in it, so have we fumigated the whole house "

It was lucky, thought Minnie, that her husband was so deaf He would never have forgiven her.

"Well, good gracious!" said Mrs Jones. As her eyes got used to the dim light she caught sight of a broad head with two beady yellow eyes, peering at her from a soap-box. "And is that a cat you have there, Mrs Williams?"

"It is a *pig*!" she cried with sudden heat, for her new leg showed an obvious desire to kick Mrs Jones out of the house. "It has the wind," she explained, "so we thought it would be best in the house, indeed "

"Well, good gracious me!" repeated Mrs Jones.

Minnie's leg was quivering, but she managed to control it. Mrs Jones was staring past her at the pig, as if she could not take her eyes off it As, indeed, she could not for suddenly she shot half across the road, backward, with the force of a bullet and when released she scrambled down the street, as she herself explained it, "as if the devil was after me": and there was the Stranger, wrapped still in the red-flannel petticoat, sitting on the window-sill and grinning amiably at her back.

III

If Mr Williams had lived longer, a few curious things might have happened in Cylfant village but he did not. There was a buzzing feeling in his head all that day, and when he went to bed at night he lay quietly on his back staring at the ceiling It had turned a bright green Presently, with his eyes open still, he began to snore Minnie did not notice anything queer, and in the small hours of the morning, after two or three loud snorts, he stopped altogether

When he felt better, he found that his soul was outside his

body It was not at all the kind of thing he had expected—it to be, but was fairly round, and made of some stuff like white of egg He gathered it gently into his arms, and began to float about his body had disappeared. Presently he was aware that the Stranger was still watching him.

"You'll be damned for this double-damned even, for giving place to the devil—and you a priest." He sighed "It is so hard," he went on seriously, "even for devils to conquer their better nature Oh, I *try* hard enough I surely try The seeds of goodness have lurked in us ever since the Fall try as we will, they *sprout*

*"With a fork drive Nature out,
She will ever yet return*

"Temptation is always lurking ready for us it is a long and a hard fight the Forces of Evil against the Forces of Good But we shall conquer in the end with Wrong on our side, we *must* conquer" There was an elation in his face that transcended all earthly ugliness "At last," he went on, "I have done a really immoral act an act with no trace of good in it, either in motive or effect. You will be damned, and Minnie will be damned too, even if she has to hop to hell on the leg I gave her But it was hard, hard"

Old Williams floated over onto the other side

"I am a sinful man," he said, "a very sinful man. Heaven was never my deserts, whatever"

The devil looked at him in surprise

"Oh, you were not!" he said earnestly. "Indeed, you were not! You were the truest—"

He stopped suddenly Williams was aware of the presence of some very unpleasant personality He looked round and behind him stood a tall figure with thin, tight lips and watery eyes, who began speaking at once—rapidly, as if by rote

"As a matter of form," said he, "I claim this soul."

"As a matter of form," replied the devil in a singsong voice, "he is mine"

The angel rapped out "De qua causa?"

"De diabolo consortando," chaunted the little devil, in even worse Latin

"Quae sit evidentia?"

"Tuos voco oculos ipsos"

"Quod vidi, vero, atque affirmo —Satis," continued the angel. "Tuumst" And he turned to go.

"Stop!" cried the Stranger suddenly, all his bad resolutions breaking down

"Stop!" he cried, and began speaking rapidly. "I'm a backslider, I know, but the strain is too much there's no true devilry in me Take him take him. there never was better Christian in Wales, I swear it and to that alone his damnation is due. pure charity—"

"What are you talking about?" snapped the angel petulantly. "The case is settled I have withdrawn my claim"

"So do I!" cried the devil excitedly. "I withdraw mine"

The angel shrugged his wings

"What's the use of making a scene?" he said "Never, in all my office, have I known a fiend break down and forget himself like this before You are making an exhibition of yourself, sir! Besides, if we both withdraw, he can't go anywhere It's none of my business"

He shrugged his wings and soared away.

"*Heaven or Hell or the Land of Whipperginny*," murmured Williams to himself, vague memories of Nashe rising to the surface of his astonishment. Together they watched the angel's purple pinions bearing him from sight: the Stranger cocked a snook at his straight back.

"Where now?" asked the rector.

"Where now? Heaven! Wait till he's out of sight."

He turned and winked broadly at Williams, making a motion on his bare shanks as if to thrust his hand in a pocket.

"You come with me," he said. "I know how I can get things fixed for you!"

Stephen Grendon

Mrs. Manifold

I don't know whether I would have gone into the Sailor's Rest if I had seen its proprietress before I saw the grimy card with its scrawled "Clerk Wanted" in the window. But perhaps I would—a man with less than a shilling in his pocket, and little chance to add to that, can't hesitate too much. Still, there was something about Mrs. Manifold, something you could feel but hardly put into words. I never saw anyone so fat, though she was a short woman, she weighed over three hundred pounds, and it was easy to understand why she preferred to keep to her own room on the fourth floor—a gable room.

"Ever been a clerk before, Mr. Robinson?" she asked me.

Her voice was thin, high, almost piping, it was a small voice for so big a woman, and because it was so shrill and penetrating, the contrast was the more startling.

"No. But I can read and write, I can add figures, if it comes to that," I said.

She gave me a sharp glance. "It's plain to see you've had some schooling. Down on your luck, is it?"

I admitted that.

She sat looking at me, humming a queer little tune, which I came to recognize later when she sang it a sea-chanty. In all that tremendous bulk, only her eyes seemed to move—small, black, with short-lashed eyelids, there was no evidence that she breathed, no tremor disturbed her flesh, clad in a dress of black satin, which, despite her great mass, was frilled and ruffled like a child's frock and looked almost obscene. Her eyes scrutinized me with a kind of bold furtiveness, her fat fingers resting on the arms of the chair which contained her strangely motionless body. There was something horrible, not in a bestial sense, but in a spiritual way, about her—not in any one facet, but in everything—something that suggested terror and cold grue.

"My clientele," she said in a voice suddenly subdued, but with a crafty smile, "might not always be a nice one, Mr Robinson. A rough lot, Mr. Robinson. You wouldn't expect anything else of Wapping, now, would you? Or of somebody like Mrs Ambrose Manifold?"

Then she tittered. A faint ripple disturbed that vast bulk, and the effect was wholly horrible.

"I can hold my own," I said.

"Perhaps. Perhaps. We shall see, Mr. Robinson. Your duties will be simple. You know what an innkeeper's clerk must do. Make them sign the register, Mr. Robinson. Sometimes they have reason to avoid it. Once a week, you will bring the register up to me. I wish to examine it. The money will be deposited to my account at the Bridsley Bank whenever and as soon as it collects to fifty pounds. I am not at home to anyone. Begin now."

Thereupon she rang a little bell, and the old man who had conducted me up the stairs led the way back down, having been instructed by Mrs. Manifold that I was to begin my duties at once.

I lost no time acquainting myself with my surroundings. While the old man, whose name was Mr. Claitor, removed the sign from the window and put it carefully away, with an air of doubtless needing it soon again, I took a look at the registry. It was nothing but an old ledger, on the first page of which someone had written in a flowing hand, "*Sailors' Rest*—*Registry*." There were two floors of rooms, which someone's fancy had numbered, to make seven in all—four on the second, three on the third; the first floor being given over to the kitchen, the small lobby, and three closet-like rooms for the staff. One of these was occupied by Mr. Claitor, another by Mr. and Mrs. Jeffers, and the third by the clerk of *Sailors' Rest*. Six of the rooms were occupied at four shillings the night, six for day and night, evidently there were no rates by the week. The lobby had an appearance of genteel shabbiness, it was not exactly dirty, but it was certainly not clean, and it conveyed the impression of never having been quite clean within the memory of any living person. The glass in the window and the door facing the street was fly-specked.

and dust-streaked, and there was about the entire building a faint but unmistakable odor of the river The Thames flowed not far away, and at night its musk, rising with the fog, enclosed and permeated the old building

Mr Claitor, who was tall, thin, and gray, with the lugubrious expression of a very tired Great Dane, got around to instructing me, finally, that the lobby was to be closed promptly at nine o'clock every night, though, thereafter, I might expect to be summoned to open the door for one or more of our tenants come roistering home

Probably there is nothing so tiring as the position as clerk in a shabby, hole-in-a-corner inn, which seems designed to attract only the dregs of mankind the bitter, disillusioned old men of the sea—the hopeless wanderers haunting Limehouse and Whitechapel and Wapping—the hunted and the haunted and the lost. Yet, I suppose everyone in a position not especially to his liking is similarly convinced, the human being is essentially weak and insecure, no matter what his place in life, and if that place is not felicitous, that weakness makes itself manifest in dissatisfaction, out of which grows the conviction that anything at all is better than the present position Work at the Sailors' Rest was monotonous, even when there were books to be read—which was not often, and it soon became a pattern

But the weekly trip to Mrs Manifold's gable room was somehow never quite part of that pattern There was something a little different every time, despite the fact that her position never seemed to have changed, for all her appearance, she need never have moved from one week to the next, and not at all since first I saw her Every time she would take the registry and examine the new entries

"Roald Jensen," she read out slowly "Now, what is he like? Is he a tall man or is he short?"

"Tall, thin, sandy-red hair, one wooden leg He wears a moustache Last sailed on the *Lofoten* out of Oslo"

"Frederick Schwartz, then What is he like?"

"Short, fat Looks like a German Burgomeister Red cheeks, blue eyes Very talkative Heavy German accent. Last sailed on the *Stresemann* out of Hamburg"

"Good gracious, Mr. Robinson," she said on occasion, "you should have been a policeman I admire the quality of observation"

But, each time she said it, I caught the unmistakable impression that she was laughing at me behind her small, dark eyes, and each time she finished her examination of the registry, I could not escape the conviction that she did so with relief, so that I wondered often why she insisted on taking this trouble at all if she concluded it always with such manifest satisfaction at being done with it.

Once, she was talkative. She said comparatively little, but I learned from her that she had had some kind of place in Singapore half a dozen years ago or thereabouts; she and her husband had run it. Then she had come to England.

"And where is Mr. Manifold now?" I asked her

"Ah, nobody knows, nobody knows Nobody, Mr. Robinson"

Thereafter she had given the unmistakable sign of having finished with me—closing her eyes and leaning back, inert, save for a trembling of her thick lips, as she hummed the chanty she sometimes sang

*"Oh, the Captain's in the brig, Lads,
The First Mate's brains are blown;
We'll sail the Seven Seas, Lads,
And make them all our own . . ."*

But there were diversions, though they were out of the ordinary

Sometimes gentlemen from the C I D at Scotland Yard came around to look for somebody—on the average, once a fortnight. Sometimes one of our registrants walked out and never came back, leaving all his baggage behind to be stored against his return—which might not happen. Things could happen in the fogs, things could take place no one ever found out—robbery and sudden death, suicide sometimes. I never felt any inclination to go outside on a foggy night, daytime was dreary enough, for the Sailors' Rest was not in a good neighborhood—oh, good enough, for what it was, I suppose, but not good enough for what it might have been. And there

was something about Mrs Manifold, too, that seemed to say she had known better days and a better business than this, even if in Singapore

Singapore! Perhaps it had its holes like Sailors' Rest, its districts like Wapping, too—but, being far away, it was caught in a kind of magic aura, it took on color and life and drama built up solely in imagination, as of all faraway places which are never, somehow, quite real, and always, always wonderfully exciting. Why had Mrs Manifold left Singapore to come to London? And why had she come down into Wapping, of all places? But here she was, and apparently content to be here, making no complaint, occasionally even making sly remarks about her reduced station in life. Yet she need not have been here, for her balance at the bank was always written in five figures—in ready funds alone, she was worth more than fifty thousand pounds

But for all the signs of breeding which showed through, there was never anything which could dispel that feeling of terror she could induce. Did it arise out of her shocking obesity, or from some other, hidden source? All too often revulsion stimulates dislike and hatred; it is impossible sometimes to uncover the roots of fear or horror. Curiously, she had but one taboo, about which I heard from Mr Claitor, when he came to my room one night

"Mrs Manifold says you are not to drink wine, Mr Robinson. No wine in the house, she says. It's the rule of Sailors' Rest."

When I mentioned it to her, she confirmed it. "Wine I cannot abide, Mr Robinson. Ale, yes. Whiskey, yes. Gin, if you like Vermouth, certainly. Whatever you wish—but no wine."

She occupied her gable in lordly splendor. Splendor being relative, her self-denial did not diminish it. She ruled Sailors' Rest with an unchallenged and indomitable will. In a sense, she was Sailors' Rest, and Sailors' Rest was Mrs Manifold, sometimes at night, in that borderland between sleep and waking, I thought of the old building as somehow alive, squatting obscenely in its row of ancient buildings, with small black window-eyes, like Mrs Manifold's, and straight black hair, parted in the middle and drawn around back over invisible ears, and gold hoops for earrings, I thought of the

wide, fly-specked, dust-streaked window in front expanding briefly, fleetingly into a sly-lipped smile, something akin to a leer. Like the fog and the musk of the Thames, Mrs. Manifold's presence permeated the very walls, made itself felt in every nook and cranny, and lingered in the quiet air.

In the middle of my eleventh week, early one hot summer night, there came an old sailor just in on *H M S Malaya*, out of Singapore. A Yankee, by the look of him, with a brush of short beard reaching around his chin from one ear to another a Quaker cut, I think they call it. He was in his sixties, I judged, and did not like the look of the place, saying so, and adding that there was no other.

"I'll stay the night," he said.

"American?" I asked.

"Born there. Spent most of my life in Singapore."

Perhaps it was natural that I should ask whether he had ever heard of Mrs. Ambrose Manifold. There was nothing to show that he was within shouting distance of her.

"Mrs. Manifold," he said, and grinned. "Mister, there was a woman big enough for half a dozen women. Never been as good a house in Singapore since she lit out for parts unknown."

"Why did she leave?"

"Who knows? Women don't do things sensible, Mister. She was making money faster'n they could spend it. Then Amby run out on her, and she closed up her place, and off she went. Biggest thing I ever seen to drop out of sight like that!"

"What happened to him?" I asked.

"Nobody knows that, Mister. They didn't get along too well sometimes. Amby liked to drink—but he was a wine-drinker—in Singapore! He could get sick stewed on wine faster'n you could say Jack Robinson. Your name ain't Jack, is it?"

"No," I said. "It doesn't matter."

"Well, Amby run out on her, though how he did it, God knows. And he took along the biggest cask of wine they had in the cellar. The way she watched him and all, he was sly and fast to get out—and with that wine, too! Nobody ever saw him go—but the cask of wine he had hauled out bold as brass! He had his mind made up, Mister—and so would you,

if you ever saw Mrs Manifold What could a man do with a woman as fat as that, eh, Mister?"

He poked me in the ribs and said that he was tired

In the morning he was gone, but he had paid in advance; so it was his privilege to go when he liked It was necessary to get one-night payment in advance to guard against this method of departure

And that week end, when Mrs Manifold came upon his name, her eyes held to it, and she began to tremble—a strange sight, like the shaking of jelly, a shuddering and trembling that was unpleasant to behold

"Joshua Bennington Mr Robinson—a well-built man with a brown beard, was he? From Singapore One night, too! In midweek. Ah, too bad, too bad! Why didn't you let me know?"

"I had no idea you would want to know before now I have my instructions "

"Yes, yes—that's true Singapore! I would have liked to talk to him "

She said no more, but there was a strange expression in her eyes I could not fathom it Triumph, amusement, regret—all these were there—or were they only reflections from my own imagination? It was difficult to tell with Mrs Manifold But the trembling in her body continued for a long time, and I was anxious to get away, to get out of that gable room, to escape the burden of her eyes

Three days after that, something changed in that old inn.

The change was in Mrs Manifold, too, and it happened after the empty seventh room was filled He came in just before closing time, a small man with a limp, with his hat pulled down low, and his face all muffled up against the fog which was so thick it had got into the lobby and was yellow in the light at the desk He was wet with it, wet with fog—and inside wet—with wine For he reeked of it—stronger than the room reeked of the fog and the river's smell, the sickish smell of sweet wine hung about him like a cloud.

A strange man and a silent one

"Good evening, sir," I said.

No answer

I turned the registry toward him, holding out the pen
 "Number Seven left, sir," I said "Will it be for the night or
 longer?"

What he said sounded like, "Longer," but his voice was so
 muffled I could not easily tell.

"A wet night, sir," I said

He signed the registry in a crabbed hand, writing with
 difficulty, and without removing his tattered gloves

"Third floor back, last door It's standing open," I said

Without a word he left the lobby for the stairs, trailing
 that nauseating smell of wine

I looked at the registry

The writing was difficult, but it could be read, after a fashion
 Unless the fog and the addling sweetness of the wine
 smell and my imagination deceived me, I read there, "*Amb
 Manifold, late of Singapore, out of Madeira*"

I took the registry and mounted to the fourth floor The
 crack under the door showed a light, still I knocked

"It's Robinson, Mrs Manifold," I said "You told me if we
 ever got anybody else from Singapore . . ."

"Come in "

I went in She was still sitting there in her black satin dress,
 like a queen in the middle of the room.

"Let me see," she said eagerly

I put the registry before her

And then she saw Her dark-skinned face went pale, and
 if she had trembled before, she shook now—a great oh -ene
 shaking animating that mass of flesh She pushed the book
 away, and it fell to the floor. I bent and picked it up

"Seems to be the same name as your own," I said

With some effort at control, she asked the familiar ques-
 tion "What is he like?"

"Short—a small man—with a limp "

"Where is he?"

"In Number Seven—just under you."

"I want to see him."

"Now?"

"Now, Mr Robinson "

I went down the stairs and knocked on the door of Number
 Seven. No answer I knocked louder Still no answer A surly,

unpleasant man, certainly I knocked once more Still no answer

I tried the door It was open

I pushed it ajar and said softly into the darkness, "Mr. Manifold?"

No answer.

I opened the door all the way and turned up the light.

The room was empty Empty, that is, of human occupation—it was alive with the rich headiness of wine, a sickening sweetness, cloying and repelling There was no sign that the bed had been touched, yet the door of the room was closed, where it had been open before, so he had been there, since no one else had

I went downstairs into the lobby, but no one was there, and the outer door was locked, as I had left it Mr Manifold was nowhere to be seen

I went back to the gable room where Mrs Manifold waited.

"Well?" she asked, seeing me alone

"I can't find him," I said "I tried his room, but he's gone "

She was still shaking, but in the midst of her inner turmoil, she asked, "Mr Robinson, have you been drinking wine?"

"No That smell came in with him He's been drinking, I suspect. Madeira, I think—or something equally heavy A sweet port "

But she was not listening Or rather, she was not listening to me Her little eyes had narrowed, and she was leaning a little to one side, with her massive head on her great shoulders cocked somewhat to the left and down, as if she were listening to something from below

"Do you hear someone singing, Mr Robinson?" she asked in a harsh whisper

"Can't say as I do," I answered, after a moment of listening

"It goes like this," she said, and sang with horrible urgency the familiar lines of her own chanty—

*"Oh, the Captain's in the brig, Lads,
The First Mate's brains are blown,
We'll sail the Seven Seas, Lads,
And make them all our own . . ."*

"No," I said

She closed her eyes and leaned back. "Let me know when you see him again, Mr. Robinson"

After that, Mrs. Manifold's bell rang several times a day for me

First it was, "Get that smell of wine out of this house, Mr. Robinson."

But I couldn't open doors and windows as I would, I couldn't get that smell of wine out there it was—rich, heady, nauseating, it had come in to stay, and there was nothing to do but live with it I could imagine how it bothered her, what with her hatred for the stuff, but it was in her room, too, and she had to endure it as well as the rest of us

Then, afterward, it was about Mr. Manifold. Had I seen him?

No, I had not I never saw him again He had gone without paying, but then, he never rightly used that room except to put the smell of wine into it, and there was no charge for that

And did I hear that singing?

I never did

But she did, and it bothered her And it bothered her, too, to hear Mr. Manifold the way she said she did She knew his walk, there was a slight drag because of that limp I never heard anything like that, and neither did anyone else, for she did ask Mr. Claitor, who had not even seen Mr. Manifold, as I had

I used to ask myself, if it were indeed her husband, why had he come? And, having come, why had he gone without so much as saying hello or good-bye to his wife? It was strange—but Sailors' Rest was a place for strange things to happen even in the ordinary course of its monotonous existence.

Mrs. Manifold was not the same

If anything, she was more terrible There was a greater furtiveness about her, there was less sly humor, almost nothing of humor at all, there was an unmistakable grimness, a kind of terrible bravado, and there was above everything else something about her that made her far more horrible than she had ever seemed to me—something that made me think of death and fear of death, of violence and unimaginable horror, something eldritch and ineffably terrible, some-

thing that throbbed in the core of Mrs Manifold as the red blood coursed through the heart keeping life in that bulging mound of flesh

And being with her even for the little while I had to be there was infinitely unpleasant, for she was always listening, catching her breath and listening, and hearing things when there was nothing to hear. And she was always asking questions I couldn't answer to please her, and scolding at me to clear the air of that wine smell, which was impossible—but I needn't ever have told her for all the impression it made on her. And she went on, sometimes, about her husband

"Always the wine and never tending to business, that was Ambrose," she said. "And the women, too. Never could leave them alone. I gave him wine—more than he could drink, damn his black soul!"

I heard that over and over. If I heard it once, I heard it a score of times. It was better than that terrible listening. You can't imagine what it is until you go through such a thing by yourself. Even today, long after my short tenure at Sailors' Rest, I can see that horrible, obese woman with her flesh lapping out over the sides of her chair, pushing out between the slats, leaning that vast bulk over to listen with her black-haired head and the golden hooped earrings glistening in the feeble yellow light that was in the room, to listen for the sound of singing and the dragging limp, I can still hear her shrill, piping voice complain about the stench of wine, the nauseating sweetness of that cloying odor brought into the Sailors' Rest on that fateful night of fog

—And then, one night, the end came

I woke out of my sleep, and that wine smell was thick enough to choke me. I got up and opened the door of my room, and then I heard the singing—something like she said, only a little different, and it went like this—

*"Oh, the Old Man's in the Deep, Lads,
The Madam's packed and flown—
I'll sail the Seven Seas, Lads,
Until I find her home. "*

It was coming from somewhere upstairs; so I went back and put something on I came out again and started up the stairs, and I thought I could hear that dragging walk Mrs Manifold always said she heard, but I could not be sure

I got up to the third flight of stairs when I heard her scream It was Mrs Manifold's voice, shrill and awful, and she was screaming at her husband.

"Go away, Ambrose! Go back!" she cried in that horrible, piping voice that came so unnaturally from her obese body "Don't touch me!"

And then there was just a terrible, unnatural scream, diminishing into a choking, gurgling sound

I was struck motionless with fright until Claitor came up behind me, agitated and scared; then I pulled myself together and ran up to the fourth floor. Claitor was right behind me, which turned out to be the best thing for me, since he could testify later on, and there was nothing the people at Scotland Yard could do to me.

Because Mrs Manifold was dead—choked to death She lay there on the floor, with her black satin dress ripped down one side, and her white flesh pushing out from the tear, and her eyes turned up All over the room there was a smell of sweet wine so thick that it seemed there was no air left—only that sickening smell.

And there was something else—something that shouldn't have been, something nobody could explain

There were bones scattered in the room, human bones, a man's bones—and sharp, deep marks in Mrs. Manifold's neck where she had been choked, and pieces of cloth and a battered old hat I had seen once before on a night when the fog was yellow in the light at the desk of the Sailors' Rest .

There was nothing Scotland Yard could say to explain all that

But then, there was no reason why they should think of any connection between what happened up there in that gable room where Mrs Manifold was hiding and what they found up the Thames from its mouth, far up, in Wapping An old wine-cask out of Singapore, a cask that had once held Madeira and now was stove in at one end, and held nothing but

the bones of two toes and a finger—nothing to tell them that Mrs Manifold had killed her husband and put his body in that cask of wine and had it carried far out to sea, weighted perhaps, to sink until time and the tide carried it far from Singapore—just as whatever it was came into the Sailors' Rest that foggy night put it down in the registry—

"Amb Manifold, late of Singapore, out of Madeira"

Or was it somebody's ghoulish sense of humor? Out of Madeira indeed! I cannot abide the smell of it to this day!

Piffingcap

Piffingcap had the cup from an old friend, a queer-minded man. He had given it to him just before he had gone out of this continent, not for the first but for the last time—a cup of lead with an inscription upon it in decent letters but strange words.

"Here, Elmer," said his old friend to the barber of Bagwood, "have this—there's the doom of half a million beards in it!"

Piffingcap laughed, but without any joy, for his heart was heavy to lose his friend.

"There is in it too," continued Grafton, offering the pot and tapping it with his forefinger, "a true test of virtue—a rare thing, as you know, in these parts. Secondly, there is in it a choice of fortunes, and thirdly, it may be, a triple calamity and—and—and very serious, you know, but there you are." He gave it into the barber's hand with a slight sigh. While his friend duly admired the dull gift the traveller picked up his walking stick and winked at himself in the mirror.

And Elmer Piffingcap, the barber of Bagwood, took his friend's cup, set it in a conspicuous place upon the shelf of his shop, and bade that friend good-bye, a little knot rolling into his lungs as they shook their two hands together.

"It is true then," said he, staring at the shining baldness of his friend who stood with hat and stick in hand—for as Piffingcap dared not look into his friend's eyes, the gleam of the skull took his gaze, as a bright thing will seize the mind of a gnat—"it is true, then, I shall see you no more?"

"No more again," said the wanderer affably, replacing his hat—disliking that pliant will-less stare of the barber's mournful eyes. This wandering man had a heart full of bravery though he could not walk with pride, for the corns and bunkies he suffered would have crippled a creature of four

feet, leave alone two. But—would you believe it—he was going now to walk himself for all his days round and round the world. O, he was such a man as could put a deceit upon the slyest, with his tall hat and his jokes, living as easy as a bird in the softness and sweetness of the year.

"And if it rains, it rains," he declared to Polly, "and I squat like a hare in the hedge and keep the blessed bones of me dry and my feet warm—it's not three weeks since it happened to me, my neck as damp as the inside of an onion, and my curly locks caught in blackberry bushes—stint your laughing, Polly!—the end of my nose as cold as a piece of dead pork, and the place very inconvenient with its sharp thorns and nettles—and no dockleaf left in the whole parish. But there was young barley wagging in the field, and clover to be smelling, and rooks to be watching, and doves, and the rain heaving its long sigh in the greyness—I declare to my God it was a fine handsome day I had that day, Polly!"

In the winter he would be sleeping in decent nooks, eating his food in quiet inns, drying his coat at the forge, and so he goes now into the corners of the world—the little husky fat man, with large spectacles and fox-coloured beard and tough boots that had slits and gouts in them—gone seeking the feathers out of Priam's peacock. And let him go, we take no more concern of him or his shining skull or his tra-la-la in the highways.

The barber, who had a romantic drift of mind, went into his saloon, and taking up the two cracked china lather mugs he flung them from the open window into his back garden, putting the fear of some evil into the mind of his drowsy cat, and a great anticipation in the brains of his two dusty hens, who were lurking there for anything that could be devoured. Mr Piffingcap placed the pot made of lead upon his convenient shelf, laid therein his brush, lit the small gas stove under the copper urn, and when Polly, the child from the dairy, arrived with her small can for the barber's large jug she found him engaged in shaving the chin of Timmy James the butcher, what time Mr James was engaged in a somewhat stilted conversation with Gregory Barnes about the carnal women of Bagwood.

Polly was a little lean girl, eight or nine years old, with a face that was soft and rosy and fresh as the bud of gum on the black branches of the orchard. She wore a pretty dimity frock and had gay flowers in her hat. This was her last house of call, and, sitting down to watch Mr Piffingcap, the town's one barber, shaving friends and enemies alike, she would be the butt of their agreeable chaff because of her pleasant country jargon—as rich as nutmeg in a homely cake—or her yellow scattered hair, or her sweet eyes that were soft as remembered twilight.

"Your razor is roaring, Mr Piffingcap!"—peeping round the chair at him. "Oh, it's that Mr. James!" she would say in pretended surprise. Mr. James had a gruff beard, and the act of removing it occasioned a noise resembling that of her mother scraping the new potatoes.

"What have you got this pot for?" she chattered, "I don't like it, it's ugly."

"Don't say that now," said Mr. Piffingcap, pausing with his hand on the butcher's throttle, "it was Mr. Grafton's parting gift to me, I shall never see him again, nor will you neither, he's gone round the world for ever more this time!"

"Oh!" gurgled the child in a manner that hung between pain and delight, "has he gone to Rinjigoffer land?"

"Gone where?" roared Timothy James, lifting his large red neck from the rest.

"He's told me all about it," said the child, ignoring him.

"Well, he's not gone there," interrupted the barber.

And the child continued, "It's where the doves and the partridges are so fat that they break down the branches of the trees where they roost. . . ."

"Garn with yer!" said Mr James.

". . . and the hares are as big as foxes . . ."

"God a mercy!" said Mr James.

". . . yes, and a fox was big and brown and white like a skew-bald donkey—he! he! he! And oo yes" continued Polly, shrilling with excitement, "there was a king badger as would stop your eyes from winking if you met him walking in the dawn!"

"Lord, what should the man be doing telling you them

lies," ejaculated Timothy, now wiping his chin on the napkin. "Did he give you that cup, Piff?"

"Yes," replied the barber, "and if what he says is true there's a power o' miracle in it."

The butcher surveyed it cautiously and read the inscription:

NE SAMBRA DIVORNAK

"That's a bit o' Roosian, I should say," he remarked as he and Gregory left the saloon.

Polly picked up her empty can and looked at Mr. P.

"Won't he come back no more?"

"No, Polly, my pigeon, he won't come back."

"Didn't he like us?" asked the child.

The barber stood dumb before her bright searching eyes.

"He was better than my father," said the child, "or me uncle, or the schoolmaster"

"He's the goodest man alive, Polly," said Mr. P.

"Didn't he like us?" again she asked, and as Mr. P. could only look vaguely about the room she went out and closed the latch of the door very softly behind her

In the succeeding days the barber lathered and cut or sat smoking meditatively in his saloon, the doom began to work its will, and business, which for a quarter of a century had flourished like a plant, as indeed it was, of constant and assured growth, suddenly declined. On weekdays the barber cleaned up the chuns of his fellow townsmen alone, but on Sunday mornings he would seek the aid of a neighbour, a youngster whom he called Charleyboy, when four men would be seated at one time upon his shaving-chairs, towel upon breast and neck bared for the sacrifice, while Charleyboy dabbed and pounded their crops into foam. Mr. Piffingcap would follow him, plying his weapon like the genius he was, while Charleyboy again in turn followed *him*, drying with linen, cooling with rhum, or soothing with splendid unguent. "Next gent, please!" he would cry out, and the last shorn man would rise and turn away, dabbing his right hand into the depths of his breeches pocket and elevating that with his

left before producing the customary tribute

But the genius of Piffingcap and the neat hand of Charley languished in distress. There was no gradual cessation, the thing completely stopped, and Piffingcap did not realise until too late, until, indeed, the truth of it was current in the little town everywhere but in his own shop, that the beards once shaven by him out of Grafton's pot grew no more in Bagwood; and there came the space of a week or so when not a soul entered the saloon but two schoolboys for the cutting of hair, and a little housemaid for a fringe net.

Then he knew, and one day, having sat in the place the whole morning like a beleaguered rat, with ruin and damnation a hand's-breadth only from him, he rushed from his shop across to the hardware merchant's and bought two white china mugs, delicately lined with gold and embossed with vague lumps, and took them back to the saloon.

At dinner-time he put the cup of lead into his coat pocket and walked down the street in an anxious kind of way until he came to the bridge at the end of the town. It was an angular stone bridge, crossing a deep and leisurely flowing river, along whose parapet boys had dared a million times, wearing smooth, with their adventuring feet, its soft yellow stone. He stared at the water and saw the shining flank of a tench as it turned over. All beyond the bridge were meads thick with ripe unmown grass and sweet with scabious bloom. But the barber's mind was harsh with the rancour of noon heats and the misfortunes of life. He stood with one hand resting upon the hot stone and one upon the heavy evil thing in his pocket. The bridge was deserted at this hour, its little traffic having paused for the meal. He took, at length, the cup from his pocket, and whispering to himself "God forgive you, Grafton," he let it fall from his fingers into the water; then he walked sharply home to his three daughters and told them what he had done.

"You poor loon!" said Bersa.

"O man! man!" moaned Grue

"You're the ruin of us all!" cried Mavie

Three fine women were Grue and Mavie and Bersa, in spite of the clamour of the outlandish Piffingcap names, and their father had respect for them and admired their hand-

someness But they had for their father, all three of them, the principal filial emotion of compassion, and they showed that his action had been a foolish action, that there were other towns in the world besides Bagwood, and that thousands and millions of men would pay a good price to be quit of a beard, and be shaved from a pot that would complete the destruction of all the unwanted hairiness of the world And they were very angry with him.

"Let us go and see to it. . . . what is to be done now. . . . bring us to the place, father!"

He took them down to the river, and when they peered over the side of the bridge they could see the pot lying half sunk in some white sand in more than a fathom of water

"Let us instruct the waterman," they said, "he will secure it for us"

In the afternoon Grue met the waterman, who was a sly young fellow, and she instructed him, but at teatime word was brought to Piffingcap that the young waterman was fallen into the river and drowned. Then there was grief in his mind, for he remembered the calamity which Grafton had foretold, and he was for giving up all notions of re-taking the cup, but his daughter Bersa went in a few days to a man who was an angler and instructed him, and he took a crooked pole and leaned over the bridge to probe for the cup In the afternoon word was brought to Piffingcap that the parapet had given way, and the young angler in falling through had dashed out his brains on the abutment of the bridge And the young gaffer whom Mavie instructed was took of a sunstroke and died on the bank.

The barber was in great grief at these calamities, he had tremors of guilt in his mind, no money in his coffers, and the chins of the Bagwood men were still as smooth as children's, but it came to him one day that he need not fear any more calamities, and that a thing which had so much tricks in it should perhaps be cured by trickery

"I will go," he said, "to the Widow Buckland and ask her to assist me"

The Widow Buckland was a wild strange woman who lived on a heath a few miles away from Bagwood, so he went over one very hot day to the Widow and found her cottage in the

corner of the heath. There was a caravan beside the cottage—it was a red caravan with yellow wheels. A blackbird hung in a wicker cage at the door, and on the side of the roof board was painted

AGLAURA BUCKLAND
FEATS & GALIAS ATENDED

There was nobody in the caravan so he knocked at the cottage door, the Widow Buckland led him into her dim little parlour

"It 'ull cost you half a James!" says she when Mr Piffingcap had given her his requirements

"Half a what?" cried he

"You are *not*," said the gipsy, "a man of a mean heart, are you?" She said it very persuasively, and he felt he could not annoy her for she was a very large woman with sharp glances

"No," said Piffingcap.

"And you'll believe what I'm telling you, won't you?"

"Yes," said Piffingcap

"It 'ull maybe some time before my words come true, but come true they will, I can take *my* oath."

"Yes," again said Piffingcap

"George!" she bawled to someone from the doorway, "wher'd yer put my box?"

There was an indistinct reply but she bawled out again, "Well, *fetch* it off the rabbit hutch!"

"And a man like you," she continued, turning again to the barber, "doesn't think twice about half a sovereign, and me putting you in the way of what you want to know, *I'm* sure!"

And Piffingcap mumbled dubiously, "No," producing with difficulty some shillings, some coppers, and a postal order for one and threepence which a credulous customer had that morning sent him for a bottle of hairwash

"Let's look at your 'and," she said, taking it she reflected gravely

"You're a man that's 'ad your share o' trouble, ain't you?" Piffingcap bowed meekly

"And you've 'ad your 'appy days, ain't you?"

A nod

"Well listen to me, you've got more fortune in store for you if you know how to pluck it . . . you understand my meaning, don't you? . . . than any man in the town this bleedun minute Right, George," she exclaimed, turning to a very ugly little hunchbacked fellow—truly he was a mere squint of a man, there was such a little bit of him for so much uncomeliness The Widow Buckland took the box from the hunchback and, thrusting him out of the room, she shut fast the door and turned the key in the lock Then she drew up a bit of a table to the window, and taking out of the box a small brass vessel and two bottles she set them before her

"Sit down there, young feller," she said, and Piffingcap sat down at the end of the table facing the window The Widow turned to the window, which was a small square, the only one in the room, and closed over it a shutter The room was clapped in darkness except for a small ray in the middle of the shutter, coming through a round hole about as large as a guinea She pulled Mr Piffingcap's shoulder until the ray was shining on the middle of his forehead, she took up the brass vessel, and holding it in the light of the ray polished it for some time with her forefinger All her fingers, even her thumbs, were covered with rich sinister rings, but there were no good looks in those fingers for the nails had been munched almost away, and dirty skin hid up the whites The polished vessel was then placed on the table directly beneath the ray, drops from the two phials were poured into it, a green liquid and a black liquid, mixing together they melted into a pillar of smoke which rose and was seen only as it flowed through the beam of light, twisting and veering and spinning in strange waves

The Widow Buckland said not a word for a time, but contemplated the twisting shapes as they poured through the ray, breathing heavily all the while or suffering a slight sigh to pass out of her breast. But shortly the smoke played the barber a trick in his nose and heaving up his chin he rent the room with a great sneeze When he recovered himself she was speaking certain words

"Fire and water I see and a white virgin's skin The triple gouts of blood I see and the doom given over. Fire and water I see and a white virgin's skin "

She threw open the shutter, letting in the light, smoke had ceased to rise but it filled the parlour with a sweet smell

"Well . ." said Mr Piffingcap dubiously

And the Widow Buckland spoke over to him plainly and slowly, patting his shoulder at each syllable,

"Fire and water and a white virgin's skin."

Unlatching the door she thrust him out of the house into the sunlight. He tramped away across the heath meditating her words, and coming to the end of it he sat down in the shade of a bush by the side of the road, for he felt sure he was about to capture the full meaning of her words But just then he heard a strange voice speaking, and speaking very vigorously He looked up and observed a man on a bicycle, riding along toward him, talking to himself in a great way.

"He is a political fellow rehearsing a speech," said Mr. Piffingcap to himself, "or perhaps he is some holy-minded person devising a sermon "

It was a very bald man and he had a long face hung with glasses, he had no coat and rode in his shirt and knicker-bockers, with hot thick stockings and white shoes The barber watched him after he had passed and noted how his knees turned angularly outwards at each upward movement, and how his saddlebag hung at the bottom of his back like some ironical label

"Fool!" exclaimed Mr Piffingcap, rising angrily, for the man's chatter had driven his mind clean away from the Widow Buckland's meaning But it was only for a short while, and when he got home he called one of his daughters into the saloon.

"My child," said Piffingcap, "you know the great trouble which is come on me?" and he told Bersa his difficulty and requested her aid, that is to say. would she go down in the early morning in her skin only and recover the pot?

"Indeed no, father!" said his daughter Bersa, "it is a very evil thing and I will not do your request."

"You will not?" says he

"No!" says she, but it was not in the fear of her getting her death that she refused him

So he called to another of his daughters

"My child," said he, "you know the great trouble that is come on me," and he told Mavie his desire and asked for her aid

"Why, my father," says she, "this is a thing which a black hag has put on us all and I will get my death I love you as I love my life, father, but I won't do this!"

"You will not?" says he

"No!" says she, but it was not for fear of her death she refused him

And he went to his third daughter Grue and tried her with the same thing "My child, you know the trouble that's come on me?"

"Oh, will you let me alone!" she says, "I've greater trouble on me than your mouldy pot" And it is true what she said of her trouble, for she was a girl of a loose habit. So the barber said no more to them and went to his bed

Two days later, it being Saturday, he opened in the morning his saloon and sat down there And while he read his newspaper in the empty place footsteps scampered into his doorway, and the door itself was pushed open just an inch or two

"Come in," he said, rising

The door opened fully

"Zennybody here?" whispered Polly walking in very mysteriously, out of breath, and dressed in a long macintosh

"What is the matter, my little one?" he asked, putting his arm around her shoulders, for he had a fondness for her. "Ach, your hair's all wet, what's the matter?"

The little girl put her hand under the macintosh and drew out the leaden pot, handing it to the barber and smiling at him with inarticulate but intense happiness She said not a word as he stared his surprise and joy

"Why Polly, my *dear*, how *did* you get it?"

"I dived in and got it"

"You never you princess you!"

"I just bin and come straight here with it."

She opened and shut the macintosh quickly, displaying for a brief glance her little white naked figure with the slightest tremulous crook at the sharp knees

"Ah, my darling," exclaimed the enraptured barber, "and you're shivering with not a rag on you but them shoes . . . run away home, Polly, and get some things on, Polly . . . and . . . Polly, Polly!" as she darted away, "come back quick, won't you?"

She nodded brightly back at him as she sprang through the doorway He went to the entrance and watched her taking her twinkling leaps, as bonny as a young foal, along the pavement.

And there came into the barber's mind the notion that this was all again a piece of fancy tricks, but there was the dark pot, and he examined it Thoughtfully he took it into his back-yard and busied himself there for a while, not telling his daughters of its recovery When, later, Polly joined him in the garden he had already raised a big fire in an old iron brazier which had lain there

"Ah, Polly my dear, I'm overjoyed to get it back, but I dasn't keep it . . . it's a bad thing Take it in your fingers now, my dear little girl, and just chuck it in that fire Ah, we must melt the wickedness out of it," he said, observing her disappointment, "it's been the death of three men and we dasn't keep it"

They watched it among the coals until it had begun to perish drop by drop through the grating of the brazier.

Later in the day Mr Piffingcap drove Polly in a little trap to a neighbouring town to see a circus, and the pair of them had a roaring dinner at the Green Dragon Next morning when Polly brought the milk to the saloon there were Timmy James and Gregory Barnes being shaved, for beards had grown again in Bagwood

Shuttle Bop

I'd never seen the place before, and I lived just down the block and around the corner I'll even give you the address, if you like "The Shuttle Bop," between Twentieth and Twenty-first streets, on Tenth Avenue in New York City. You can find it if you go there looking for it. Might even be worth your while, too.

But you'd better not.

"The Shuttle Bop" It got me. It was a small shop with a weather-beaten sign swung from a wrought crane, creaking dismally in the late fall wind. I walked past it, thinking of the engagement ring in my pocket and how it had just been handed back to me by Audrey, and my mind was far removed from such things as shuttle bops. I was thinking that Audrey might have used a gentler term than "useless" in describing me, and her neatly turned remark about my being a "constitutional psychopathic incompetent" was as uncalled-for as it was spectacular. She must have read it somewhere, balanced as it was by "And I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth!" which is a notably worn cliché.

"Shuttle Bop!" I muttered, and then paused, wondering where I had picked up such oddly rhythmic syllables with which to express myself. I'd seen it on that sign, of course, and it had caught my eye. "And what," I asked myself, "might be a Shuttle Bop?" Myself replied promptly, "Dunno. Toddle back and have a look." So toddle I did, back along the east side of Tenth, wondering what manner of man might be running such an establishment in pursuance of what kind of business. I was enlightened on the second point by a sign in the window, all but obscured by the dust and ashes of apparent centuries, which read

WE SELL BOTTLES

There was another line of smaller print there I rubbed at the crusted glass with my sleeve and finally was able to make out

With things in them.,

Just like that:

WE SELL BOTTLES

With things in them.

Well of course I went in. Sometimes very delightful things come in bottles, and the way I was feeling, I could stand a little delighting

"Close it!" shrilled a voice, as I pushed through the door. The voice came from a shimmering egg adrift in the air behind the counter, low-down. Peering over, I saw that it was not an egg at all, but the bald pate of an old man who was clutching the edge of the counter, his scrawny body streaming away in the slight draft from the open door, as if he were made of bubbles. A mite startled, I kicked the door with my heel. He immediately fell on his face, and then scrambled smiling to his feet.

"Ah, it's good to see you again," he rasped.

I think his vocal cords were dusty, too. Everything else here was. As the door swung to, I felt as if I were inside a great dusty brain that had just closed its eyes. Oh yes, there was light enough. But it wasn't the lamplight and it wasn't daylight. It was like—like light reflected from the cheeks of pale people. Can't say I enjoyed it much.

"What do you mean, 'again'?" I asked irritably. "You never saw me before."

"I saw you when you came in and I fell down and got up and saw you again," he quibbled, and beamed. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh," I said. "Well, I saw your sign. What have you got in a bottle that I might like?"

"What do you want?"

"What've you got?"

He broke into a piping chant—I remember it yet, word for word

*"For half a buck, a vial of luck
Or a bottle of nifty breaks
Or a flask of joy, or Myrna Loy
For luncheon with sirloin steaks*

*"Pour out a mug from this old jug,
And you'll never get wet in rains
I've bottles of grins and racetrack wins
And lotions to ease your pains*

*"Here's bottles of umps and wet-pack shrimps
From a sea unknown to man,
And an elixir to banish fear,
And the sap from the pipes of Pan.*

*"With the powered horn of a unicorn
You can win yourself a mate,
With the rich hobnob, or get a job—
It's yours at a lowered rate"*

"Now wait right there!" I snapped "You mean you actually sell dragon's blood and ink from the pen of Friar Bacon and all such mumbo-jum?"

He nodded rapidly and smiled all over his improbable face. I went on—"The genuine article?"

He kept on nodding

I regarded him for a moment "You mean to stand there with your teeth in your mouth and your bare face hanging out and tell me that in this day and age, in this city and in broad daylight, you sell such trash and then expect me—me, an enlightened intellectual—"

"You are very stupid and twice as bombastic," he said quietly

I glowered at him and reached for the doorknob—and there I froze And I mean froze For the old man whipped out an ancient bulb-type atomizer and squeezed a couple of whiffs

at me as I turned away; and so help me, *I couldn't move!* I could cuss, though, and boy, did I

The proprietor hopped over the counter and ran over to me. He must have been standing on a box back there, for now I could see he was barely three feet tall. He grabbed my coat tails, ran up my back and slid down my arm, which was extended doorward. He sat down on my wrist and swung his feet and laughed up at me. As far as I could feel, he weighed absolutely nothing.

When I had run out of profanity—I pride myself on never repeating a phrase of invective—he said, "Does that prove anything to you, my cocky and unintelligent friend? That was the essential oil from the hair of the Gorgon's head. And until I give you an antidote, you'll stand there from now till a week text Neusday!"

"Get me out of this," I roared, "or I smack you so hard you lose your brains through the pores in your feet!"

He giggled.

I tried to tear loose again and couldn't. It was as if all my epidermis had turned to high-carbon steel. I began cussing again, but quit in despair.

"You think altogether too much of yourself," said the proprietor of the Shottle Bop. "Look at you! Why, I wouldn't hire you to wash my windows. You expect to marry a girl who is accustomed to the least of animal comfort, and then you get miffed because she turns you down. Why does she turn you down? Because you won't get a job. You're a no-good. You're a bum. He, he! And you have the nerve to walk around telling people where to get off. Now if I were in your position I would ask politely to be released, and then I would see if anyone in this shop would be good enough to sell you a bottle full of something that might help out."

Now I never apologize to anybody, and I never back down, and I never take any guff from mere tradesmen. But this was different. I'd never been petrified before, nor had my nose rubbed in so many galling truths. I relented. "O K., O K.; let me break away then I'll buy something."

"Your tone is sullen," he said complacently, dropping lightly to the floor and holding his atomizer at the ready.

"You'll have to say, Please Pretty please "

"Pretty please," I said, almost choking with humiliation

He went back of the counter and returned with a paper of powder which he had me snuff In a couple of seconds I began to sweat, and my limbs lost their rigidity so quickly that it almost threw me I'd have been flat on my back if the man hadn't caught me and solicitously led me to a chair As strength dribbled back into my shocked tissues, it occurred to me that I might like to flatten this hobgoblin for pulling a trick like that. But a strange something stopped me—strange because I'd never had the experience before It was simply the idea that once I got outside I'd agree with him for having such a low opinion of me

He wasn't worrying Rubbing his hands briskly, he turned to his shelves "Now let's see what would be best for you, I wonder? Hm-m-m Success is something you couldn't justify Money? You don't know how to spend it. A good job? You're not fitted for one" He turned gentle eyes on me and shook his head "A sad case *Tsk, tsk*" I crawled "A perfect mate? Nup You're too stupid to recognize perfection, too conceited to appreciate it I don't think that I can—Wait!"

He whipped four or five bottles and jars off the dozens of shelves behind him and disappeared somewhere in the dark recesses of the store Immediately there came sounds of violent activity—clinkings and little crashes, stirrings and then the rapid susurrant grating of a mortar and pestle, then the slushy sound of liquid being added to a dry ingredient during stirring, and at length, after quite a silence, the glugging of a bottle being filled through a filtering funnel The proprietor reappeared triumphantly bearing a four-ounce bottle without a label.

"This will do it!" he beamed.

"That will do what?"

"Why, cure you!"

"Cure—" My pompous attitude, as Audrey called it, had returned while he was mixing "What do you mean 'cure'? I haven't got anything!"

"My dear little boy," he said offensively, "you most certainly have Are you happy? Have you ever been happy? No

Well, I'm going to fix all that up. That is, I'll give you the start you need. Like any other cure, it requires your co-operation.

"You're in a bad way, young fellow. You have what is known in the profession as retrogressive metempsychosis of the ego in its most malignant form. You are a constitutional unemployable, a downright sociophagus. I don't like you. Nobody likes you."

Feeling a little bit on the receiving end of a blitz, I stammered, "W-what do you aim to do?"

He extended the bottle. "Go home. Get into a room by yourself—the smaller the better. Drink this down, right out of the bottle. Stand by for developments. That's all."

"But—what will it do to me?"

"It will do nothing *to* you. It will do a great deal *for* you. It can do as much for you as you want it to. But mind me, now. As long as you use what it gives you for your self-improvement, you will thrive. Use it for self-gratification, as a basis for boasting, or for revenge, and you will suffer in the extreme. Remember that, now."

"But what is it? How—"

"I am selling you a talent. You have none now. When you discover what kind of a talent it is, it will be up to you to use it to your advantage. Now go away. I still don't like you."

"What do I owe you?" I muttered, completely snowed under by this time.

"The bottle carries its own price. You won't pay anything unless you fail to follow my directions. Now will you go, or must I uncork a bottle of jinn—and I don't mean London Dry?"

"I'll go," I said. I'd seen something swirling in the depths of a ten-gallon carboy at one end of the counter, and I didn't like it a bit. "Good-bye."

"Bood-gye," he returned.

I went out and I headed down Tenth Avenue and I turned east up Twentieth Street and I never looked back. And for many reasons I wish now that I had, for there was, without doubt, something very strange about that Shottle Bop.

I didn't summer down until I got home, but once I had a cup

of black Italian coffee under my belt I felt better I was skeptical about it at last I was actually inclined to scoff But somehow I didn't want to scoff too loudly I looked at the bottle a little scornfully, and there was a certain something about the glass of it that seemed to be staring back at me I snuffed and threw it up behind some old hats on top of the closet, and then sat down to unlax I used to love to unlax I'd put my feet on the doorknob and slide down in the upholstery until I was sitting on my shoulder blades, and as the old saying has it, "Sometimes I sets and thinks, and sometimes I just sets" The former is easy enough, and is what even an accomplished loafer has to go through before he reaches the latter and more blissful state It takes years of practice to relax sufficiently to be able to "just set" I'd learned it years ago

But just as I was about to slip into the vegetable status, I was annoyed by something I tried to ignore it I manifested a superhuman display of lack of curiosity, but the annoyance persisted A light pressure on my elbow, where it draped over the arm of the chair I was put in the unpleasant predicament of having to concentrate on what it was, and realizing that concentration on anything was the least desirable thing there could be, I gave up finally, and with a deep sigh, opened my eyes and had a look.

It was the bottle

I screwed up my eyes and then looked again, but it was still there The closet door was open as I had left it, and its shelf almost directly above me Must have fallen out. Feeling that if the damn thing were on the floor it couldn't fall any farther, I shoved it off the arm of the chair with my elbow

It bounced It bounced with such astonishing accuracy that it wound up in exactly the same spot it had started from—on the arm of the easy chair, by my elbow. Startled, I shoved it violently This time I pushed it hard enough to send it against the wall, from which it rebounded to the shelf under my small table, and thence back to the chair arm—and this time it perched cozily against my shoulder Jarred by the bouncing, the stopper hopped out of the bottle mouth and

rolled into my lap; and there I sat, breathing the bitter-sweet fumes of its contents, feeling frightened and silly as hell

I grabbed the bottle and sniffed I'd smelled that somewhere before—where was it? Uh—oh, yes; that mascara the Chinese honkytonk girls use in Frisco The liquid was dark—smoky black. I tasted it cautiously. It wasn't bad If it wasn't alcoholic, then the old man in the shop had found a darn good substitute for alcohol At the second sip I liked it and at the third I really enjoyed it and there wasn't any fourth because by then the little bottle was a dead marine. That was about the time I remembered the name of the black ingredient with the funny smell Kohl It is an herb the Orientals use to make it possible to see supernatural beings Silly superstition!

And then the liquid I'd just put away, lying warm and comfortable in my stomach, began to fizz. Then I think it began to swell I tried to get up and couldn't. The room seemed to come apart and throw itself at me piecemeal, and I passed out.

Don't you ever wake up the way I did. For your own sake, be careful about things like that Don't swim up out of a sudden sleep and look around you and see all those things fluttering and drifting and flying and creeping and crawling around you—puffy things dripping blood, and filmy, legless creatures, and little bits and snatches of pasty human anatomy It was awful. There was a human hand afloat in the air an inch away from my nose, and at my startled gasp it drifted away from me, fingers fluttering in the disturbed air from my breath Something veined and bulbous popped out from under my chair and rolled across the floor. I heard a faint clicking, and looked up into a gnashing set of jaws without any face attached I think I broke down and cried a little I know I passed out again.

The next time I awoke—must have been hours later, because it was broad daylight and my clock and watch had both stopped—things were a little better. Oh, yes, there were a few of the horrors around But somehow they didn't bother me much now. I was practically convinced that I was nuts; now that I had the conviction, why worry about it? I dunno; it must have been one of the ingredients in the bottle that had

calmed me down so I was curious and excited, and that's about all I looked around me and I was almost pleased.

The walls were green! The drab wallpaper had turned to something breathtakingly beautiful. They were covered with what seemed to be moss, but never moss like that grew for human eyes to see before. It was long and thick, and it had a slight perpetual movement—not that of a breeze, but of growth. Fascinated, I moved over and looked closely. Growing indeed, with all the quick magic of spore and cyst and root and growth again to spore, and the swift magic of it was only a part of the magical whole, for never was there such a green. I put my hand to touch and stroke it, but I felt only the wallpaper. But when I closed my fingers on it, I could feel that light touch of it in the palm of my hand, the weight of twenty sunbeams, the soft resilience of jet-darkness in a closed place. The sensation was a delicate ecstasy, and never have I been happier than I was at that moment.

Around the baseboards were little snowy toadstools, and the floor was grassy. Up the hinged side of the closet door climbed a mass of flowering vines, and their petals were hued in tones indescribable. I felt as if I had been blind until now, and deaf, too, for now I could hear the whispering of scarlet, gauzy insects among the leaves and the constant murmur of growth. All around me was a new and lovely world, so delicate that the wind of my movements tore petals from the flowers, so real and natural that it defied its own impossibility. Awestruck, I turned and turned, running from wall to wall, looking under my old furniture, into my old books, and everywhere I looked I found newer and more beautiful things to wonder at. It was while I was flat on my stomach looking up at the bed springs, where a colony of jewel-like lizards had nested, that I first heard the sobbing.

It was young and plaintive, and had no right to be in my room where everything was so happy. I stood up and looked around, and there in the corner crouched the translucent figure of a little girl. She was leaning back against the wall. Her thin legs were crossed in front of her, and she held the leg of a tattered toy elephant dejectedly in one hand and cried into the other. Her hair was long and dark, and it poured and tumbled over her face and shoulders.

I said, "What's the matter, kiddo?" I hate to hear a child cry like that.

She cut herself off in the middle of a sob and shook the hair out of her eyes, looking up and past me, all fright and olive skin and big, filled violet eyes "Oh!" she squeaked.

I repeated, "What's the matter? Why are you crying?"

She hugged the elephant to her breast defensively, and whimpered, "W-where are you?"

Surprised, I said, "Right here in front of you, child. Can't you see me?"

She shook her head. "I'm scared. Who are you?"

"I'm not going to hurt you. I heard you crying, and I wanted to see if I could help you. Can't you see me at all?"

"No," she whispered "Are you an angel?"

I guffawed. "By no means!" I stepped closer and put my hand on her shoulder. The hand went right through her and she winced and shrank away, uttering a little wordless cry "I'm sorry," I said quickly. "I didn't mean . . . you can't see me at all? I can see you."

She shook her head again. "I think you're a ghost," she said.

"Do tell!" I said "And what are you?"

"I'm Giuny," she said "I have to stay here, and I have no one to play with." She blinked, and there was a suspicion of further tears.

"Where did you come from?" I asked

"I came here with my mother," she said. "We lived in lots of other rooming houses. Mother cleaned floors in office buildings. But this is where I got so sick. I was sick a long time. Then one day I got off the bed and came over here but then when I looked back I was still on the bed. It was awful funny. Some men came and put the 'me' that was on the bed onto a stretcher-thing and took it—me—out. After a while Mummy left, too. She cried for a long time before she left, and when I called to her she couldn't hear me. She never came back, and I just got to stay here."

"Why?"

"Oh, I got to. I—don't know why I just—got to."

"What do you do here?"

"I just stay here and think about things. Once a lady lived

SHOTTLER BOP

here, had a little girl just like me We used to play together until the lady watched us one day She carried on somethin' awful She said her little girl was possessed The girl kept callin' me, 'Ginny! Ginny! Tell Mamma you're here!', an' I tried, but the lady couldn't see me Then the lady got scared an' picked up her little girl an' cried, an' so I was sorry I ran over here an' hid, an' after a while the other little girl forgot about me, I guess They moved," she finished with pathetic finality

I was touched "What will become of you, Ginny?"

"I dunno," she said, and her voice was troubled "I guess I'll just stay here and wait for Mummy to come back. I been here a long time I guess I deserve it, too "

"Why, child?"

She looked guiltily at her shoes "I couldn't stand feelin' so awful bad when I was sick I got up out of bed before it was time I shoulda stayed where I was This is what I get for quittin' But Mummy'll be back, just you see "

"Sure she will," I muttered My throat felt tight. "You take it easy, kid Any time you want someone to talk to, you just pipe up I'll talk to you any time I'm around "

She smiled, and it was a pretty thing to see What a raw deal for a kid! I grabbed my hat and went out

Outside things were the same as in the room to me The hallways, the dusty stair carpets wore new garments of brilliant, nearly intangible foliage They were no longer dark, for each leaf had its own pale and different light Once in a while I saw things not quite so pretty There was a giggling thing that scuttled back and forth on the third floor landing. It was a little undistinct, but it looked a great deal like Barrel-head Brogan, a shanty-Irish bum who'd returned from a warehouse robbery a year or so ago, only to shoot himself accidentally with his own gun I wasn't sorry

Down on the first floor, on the bottom step, I saw two youngsters sitting The girl had her head on the boy's shoulder, and he had his arms around her, and I could see the banister through them I stopped to listen Their voices were faint, and seemed to come from a long way away.

He said, "There's one way out."

She said, "Don't talk that way, Tommy!"

"What else can we do? I've loved you for three years, and we still can't get married No money, no hope—no nothing Sue, if we did do it, I just *know* we'd always be together Always and always—"

After a long time she said, "All right, Tommy You get a gun, like you said" She suddenly pulled him even closer "Oh, Tommy, are you sure we'll always be together just like this?"

"Always," he whispered, and kissed her "Just like this"

Then there was a long silence, while neither moved Suddenly they were as I had first seen them, and he said.

"There's only one way out"

And she said, "Don't talk that way, Tommy!"

And he said, "What else can we do? I've loved you for three years—" It went on like that, over and over and over.

I felt lousy I went on out into the street

It began to filter through to me what had happened The man in the shop had called it a "talent." I couldn't be crazy, could I? I didn't *feel* crazy The draught from the bottle had opened my eyes on a new world What was this world?

It was a thing peopled by ghosts There they were—storybook ghosts, and regular haunts, and poor damned souls—all the fixings of a storied supernatural, all the things we have heard about and loudly disbelieved and secretly wonder about. So what? What had it all to do with me?

As the days slid by, I wondered less about my new, strange surroundings, and gave more and more thought to that question I had bought—or been given—a talent. I could see ghosts I could see all parts of a ghostly world, even the vegetation that grew in it. That was perfectly reasonable—the trees and birds and fungi and flowers A ghost world is a world as we know it, and a world as we know it must have vegetation Yes, I could see them But they couldn't see me!

O K., what could I get out of it? I couldn't talk about it or write about it because I wouldn't be believed, and besides, I had this thing exclusive, as far as I knew, why cut a lot of other people in on it?

On what, though?

No, unless I could get a steer from somewhere, there was

no percentage in it for me that I could see And then, about six days after I took that eye-opener, I remember the one place where I might get that steer

The Shottle Bop!

I was on Sixth Avenue at the time, trying to find something in a five-and-dime that Ginny might like She couldn't touch anything I brought her but she enjoyed things she could look at—picture books and such By getting her a little book on photographs of trains since the "De Witt Clinton," and asking her which of them was like ones she had seen, I found out approximately how long it was she'd been there Nearly eighteen years Anyway, I got my bright idea and headed for Tenth Avenue and the Shottle Bop I'd ask that old man—he'd tell me And when I got to Twenty-first Street, I stopped and stared Facing me was a blank wall The whole side of the block was void of people There was no sign of a shop

I stood there for a full two minutes not even daring to think. Then I walked downtown toward Twentieth, and then uptown to Twenty-first Then I did it again No shop I wound up without my question answered—what was I going to do with this "talent"?

I was talking to Ginny one afternoon about this and that when a human leg, from the knee down, complete and puffy, drifted between us I recoiled in horror, but Ginny pushed it gently with one hand It bent under the touch, and started toward the window, which was open a little at the bottom. The leg floated toward the crack and was sucked through like a cloud of cigarette smoke, reforming again on the other side It bumbled against the pane for a moment and then ballooned away

"My gosh!" I breathed "What *was* that?"

Ginny laughed "Oh, just one of the Things that's all 'e time flying around Did it scare you? I used to be scared, but I saw so many of them that I don't care any more, so's they don't light on me "

"But what in the name of all that's disgusting are they?"

"Parts" Ginny was all childish *savoir-faire*

"Parts of what?"

"People, silly. It's some kind of a game, I think. You see, if someone gets hurt and loses something—a finger or an ear or something, why, the ear—the *inside* part of it, I mean, like me being the *inside* of the 'me' they carried out of here—it goes back to where the person who owned it lived last. Then it goes back to the place before that, and so on. It doesn't go very fast. Then when something happens to a whole person, the 'inside' part comes looking for the rest of itself. It picks up bit after bit—Look!" she put out a filmy forefinger and thumb and nipped a flake of gossamer out of the air.

I leaned over and looked closely, it was a small section of semitransparent human skin, ridged and whorled.

"Somebody must have cut his finger," said Ginny matter-of-factly, "while he was living in this room. When something happens to um—you see! He'll be back for it!"

"Good heavens!" I said. "Does this happen to everyone?"

"I dunno. Some people have to stay where they are—like me. But I guess if you haven't done nothing to deserve bein' kept in one place, you have to come all around pickin' up what you lost."

I'd thought of more pleasant things in my time.

For several days I'd noticed a gray ghost hovering up and down the block. He was always on the street, never inside. He whimpers constantly. He was—or had been—a little inoffensive man of the bowler hat and starched collar type. He paid no attention to me—none of them did, for I was apparently invisible to them. But I saw him so often that pretty soon I realized that I'd miss him if he went away. I decided I'd chat with him the next time I saw him.

I left the house one morning and stood around for a few minutes in front of the brownstone steps. Sure enough, pressing through the flotsam of my new, weird co-existent world, came the slim figure of the wraith I had noticed, his rabbit face screwed up, his eyes deep and sad, and his swallowtail coat and striped waistcoat immaculate. I stepped up behind him and said, "Hi!"

He started violently and would have run away, I'm sure, if he'd known where my voice was coming from.

"Take it easy, pal," I said. "I won't hurt you."

"Who are you?"

"You wouldn't know if I told you," I said "Now stop shivering and tell me about yourself"

He mopped his ghostly face with a ghostly handkerchief, and then began fumbling nervously with a gold toothpick. "My word," he said "No one's talked to me for years I'm not quite myself, you see"

"I see," I said "Well, take it easy. I just happen to've noticed you wandering around here lately. I got curious. You looking for somebody?"

"Oh, no," he said Now that he had a chance to talk about his troubles, he forgot to be afraid of this mysterious voice from nowhere that had accosted him "I'm looking for my home"

"Hm-m-m," I said. "Been looking for a long time?"

"Oh, yes" His nose twitched "I left for work one morning a long time ago, and when I got off the ferry at Battery Place I stopped for a moment to watch the work on that new-fangled elevated railroad they were building down there All of a sudden there was a loud noise—my goodness! It was terrible—and the next thing I knew I was standing back from the curb and looking at a man who looked just like me! A girder had fallen, and—my word!" He mopped his face again. "Since then I have been looking and looking I can't seem to find anyone who knows where I might have lived, and I don't understand all the things I see floating around me, and I never thought I'd see the day when grass would grow on lower Broadway—oh, it's terrible" He began to cry

I felt sorry for him I could easily see what had happened The shock was so great that even his ghost had amnesia! Poor little egg—until he was whole, he could find no rest. The thing interested me Would a ghost react to the usual cures for amnesia? If so, then what would happen to him?

"You say you got off a ferryboat?"

"Then you must have lived on the Island . Staten Island, over there across the bay!"

"You really think so?" He stared through me, puzzled and hopeful

"Why sure! Say, how'd you like me to take you over there? Maybe we can find your house"

"Yes"

"Oh, that would be splendid! But—oh, my, what will my wife say?"

I grinned "She might want to know where you've been. Anyway, she'll be glad to see you back, I imagine. Come on; let's get going!"

I gave him a shove in the direction of the subways and strolled along behind him. Once in a while I got a stare from a passer-by for walking with one hand out in front of me and talking into thin air. It didn't bother me very much. My companion, though, was very self-conscious about it, for the inhabitants of his world screeched and giggled when they saw him doing practically the same thing. Of all the humans, only I was invisible to them, and the little ghost in the bowler hat blushed from embarrassment until I thought he'd burst.

We hopped a subway—it was a new experience for him, I gathered—and went down to South Ferry. The subway system in New York is a very unpleasant place to one gifted as I was. Everything that enjoys lurking in the dark hangs out there, and there is a quite a crop of dismembered human remains. After this day I took the bus.

We got a ferry without waiting. The little gray ghost got a real kick out of the trip. He asked me about the ships in the harbor and their flags, and marveled at the dearth of sailing vessels. He *tsk, tsked* at the Statue of Liberty; the last time he had seen it, he said, was while it still had its original brassy gold color, before it got its patina. By this I placed him in the late seventies, he must have been looking for his home for over sixty years!

We landed at the Island, and from there I gave him his head. At the top of Fort Hill he suddenly said, "My name is John Quigg. I live at 45 Fourth Avenue!" I've never seen anyone quite so delighted as he was by the discovery. And from then on it was easy. He turned left again, straight down for two blocks and again right. I noticed—he didn't—that the street was marked "Winter Avenue." I remembered vaguely that the streets in this section had been numbered years ago.

He trotted briskly up the hill and then suddenly stopped and turned vaguely "I say, are you still with me?"

"Still here," I said

"I'm all right now I can't tell you how much I appreciate this Is there anything I could do for you?"

I considered "Hardly We're of different times, you know. Things change"

He looked, a little pathetically, at the new apartment house on the corner and nodded "I think I know what happened to me," he said softly "But I guess it's all right I made a will, and the kids were grown" He sighed "But if it hadn't been for you I'd still be wandering around Manhattan Let's see—ah, come with me!"

He suddenly broke into a run. I followed as quickly as I could Almost at the top of the hill was a huge old shingled house, with a silly cupola and a complete lack of paint. It was dirty and it was tumble-down, and at the sight of it the little fellow's face twisted sadly. He gulped and turned through a gap in the hedge and down beside the house Casting about in the long grass, he spotted a boulder sunk deep into the turf

"This is it," he said "Just you dig under that There is no mention of it in my will, except a small fund to keep paying the box rent. Yes, a safety-deposit box, and the key and an authority are under that stone I hid it"—he giggled—"from my wife one night, and never did get a chance to tell her You can have whatever's any good to you" He turned to the house, squared his shoulders, and marched in the side door, which banged open for him in a convenient gust of wind I listened for a moment and then smiled at the tirade that burst forth Old Quigg was catching real hell from his wife, who'd sat waiting for over sixty years for him! It was a bitter stream of invective, but—well, she must have loved him. She couldn't leave the place until she was complete, if Ginny's theory was correct, and she wasn't really complete until her husband came home! It tickled me They'd be all right now!

I found an old pinchbar in the drive and attacked the ground around the stone It took quite a while and made my hands bleed, but after a while I pried the stone up and was able to scrabble around under it. Sure enough, there was an oiled silk pouch under there I caught it up and carefully unwrapped the strings around it. Inside was a key and a letter

addressed to a New York bank, designating only "Bearer" and authorizing the use of the key. I laughed aloud. Little old meek and mild John Quigg, I'd bet, had set aside some "mad money." With a layout like that, a man could take a powder without leaving a single sign. The son-of-a-gun! I would never know just what it was he had up his sleeve, but I'll bet there was a woman in the case. Even fixed up with his will! Ah, well—I should kick!

It didn't take me long to get over to the bank. I had a little trouble getting into the vaults, because it took quite a while to look up the box in the old records. But I finally cleared the red tape, and found myself the proud possessor of just under eight thousand bucks in small bills—and not a yellowback among 'em!

Well, from then on I was pretty well set. What did I do? Well, first I bought clothes, and then, I started out to cut ice for myself. I clubbed around a bit and got to know a lot of people, and the more I knew the more I realized what a lot of superstitious dopes they were. I couldn't blame anyone for skirting a ladder under which crouched a genuine basilisk, of course, but what the heck—not one in a thousand have beasts under them! Anyway, my question was answered. I dropped two grand on an elegant office with drapes and dim indirect lighting, and I got me a phone installed and a little quiet sign on the door—Psychic Consultant. And, boy, I did all right.

My customers were mostly upper crust, because I came high. It was generally no trouble to get contact with people's dead relatives, which was usually what they wanted. Most ghosts are crazy to get in contact with this world anyway. That's one of the reasons that almost anyone can become a medium of sorts if he tries hard enough; Lord knows that it doesn't take much to contact the average ghost. Some, of course, were not available. If a man leads a pretty square life, and kicks off leaving no loose ends, he gets clear. I never did find out where these clear spirits went to. All I knew was that they weren't to be contacted. But the vast majority of people have to go back and tie up those loose ends after they die—righting a little wrong here, helping someone they've hindered, cleaning up a bit of dirty work. That's where luck

itself comes from, I do believe. You don't get something for nothing

If you get a nice break, it's been arranged that way by someone who did you dirt in the past, or someone who did wrong to your father or your grandfather or your great-uncle Julius Everything evens up in the long run, and until it does, some poor damned soul is wandering around the earth trying to do something about it. Half of humanity is walking around crabbing about its tough breaks If you and you and you only knew what dozens of powers were begging for the chance to help you if you'll let them! And if you let them, you'll help clear up the mess they've made of their lives here, and free them to go wherever it is they go when they've cleaned up. Next time you're in a jam, go away somewhere by yourself and open your mind to these folks They'll cut in and guide you all right, if you can drop your smugness and your mistaken confidence in your own judgment.

I had a couple of ghostly stooges to run errands for me One of them, an ex-murderer by the name of One-eye Rachuba, was the fastest spook ever I saw, when it came to locating a wanted ancestor, and then there was Professor Gafe, a frog-faced teacher of social science who'd embezzled from a charity fund and fallen into the Hudson trying to make a get-away He could trace the most devious genealogies in mere seconds, and deduce the most likely whereabouts of the ghost of a missing relative The pair of them were all the office force I could use, and although every time they helped out one of my clients they came closer to freedom for themselves, they were both so entangled with their own sloppy lives that I was sure of their services for years

But do you think I'd be satisfied to stay where I was making money hand over fist without really working for it? Oh, no Not me No, I had to big-time I had to brood over the events of the last few months, and I had to get dramatic about that screwball Audrey, who really wasn't worth my trouble It wasn't enough that I'd prove Audrey wrong when she said I'd never amount to anything And I wasn't happy when I thought about the gang I had to show them up

I even remembered what the little man in the Shottle Bop had said to me about using my "talent" for bragging or for

revenge. I figured I had the edge on everyone, everything Cocky, I was Why, I could send one of my ghostly stooges out any time and find out exactly what anyone had been doing three hours ago come Michaelmas With the shade of the professor at my shoulder, I could back-track on any far-fetched statement and give immediate and logical reasons for back-tracking No one had anything on me, and I could out-talk, out-maneuver, and out-smart anyone on earth I was really quite a fellow I began to think, "What's the use of my doing as well as this when the gang on the West Side don't know anything about it?" and "Man, would that half-wit Happy Sam burn up if he saw me drifting down Broadway in my new six-thousand-dollar roadster!" and "To think I used to waste my time and tears on a dope like Audrey!" In other words, I was tripping up on an inferiority complex I acted like a veridam fool, which I was I went over to the West Side

It was a chilly, late winter night I'd taken a lot of trouble to dress myself and my car so we'd be bright and shining and would knock some eyes out. Pity I couldn't brighten my brains up a little

I drove up in front of Casey's pool room, being careful to do it too fast, and concentrating on shrieks from the tires and a shuddering twenty-four-cylinder roar from the engine before I cut the switch I didn't hurry to get out of the car, either. Just leaned back and lit a fifty-cent cigar, and then tipped my hat over one ear and touched the horn button, causing it to play "Tuxedo Junction" for forty-eight seconds. Then I looked over toward the pool hall.

Well, for a minute I thought that I shouldn't have come, if that was the effect my return to the fold was going to have. And from then on I forgot about everything except how to get out of here

There were two figures slouched in the glowing doorway of the pool room It was up a small side street, so short that the city had depended on the place, an old institution, to supply the street lighting Looking carefully, I made out one of the silhouetted figures as Happy Sam, and the other was Fred Bellew They just looked out at me, they didn't move, they didn't say anything, and when I said, "Hiya, small fry—remember me?" I noticed that along the darkened walls

flanking the bright doorway were ranked the whole crowd of them—the whole gang. It was a shock, it was a little too casually perfect. I didn't like it.

"Hi," said Fred quietly. I knew he wouldn't like the big-timing. I didn't expect any of them to like it, of course, but Fred's dislike sprang from distaste, and the others from resentment, and for the first time I felt a little cheap. I climbed out over the door of the roadster and let them have a gander at my fine feathers.

Sam snorted and said, "Jellybean!" very clearly. Someone else giggled, and from the darkness beside the building came a high-pitched, "Woo-woo!"

I walked up to Sam and grinned at him. I didn't feel like grinning. "I ain't seen you in so long I almost forgot what a heel you were," I said. "How you making?"

"I'm doing all right," he said, and added offensively, "I'm still *working* for a living."

The murmur that ran through the crowd told me that the really smart thing to do was to get back into that shiny new automobile and hoot along out of there. I stayed.

"Wise, huh?" I said weakly.

They'd been drinking, I realized—all of them. I was suddenly in a spot. Sam put his hands in his pockets and looked at me down his nose. He was the only short man that ever could do that to me. After a thick silence he said,

"Better get back to yer crystal balls, phony. We like guys that sweat. We even like guys that have rackets, if they run them because they're smarter or tougher than the next one. But luck and gab ain't enough. Scram."

I looked around helplessly. I was getting what I'd begged for. What had I expected, anyway? Had I thought that these boys would crowd around and shake my hand off for acting this way?

They hardly moved, but they were all around me suddenly. If I couldn't think of something quickly, I was going to be mobbed. And when those mugs started mobbing a man, they did it up just fine. I drew a deep breath.

"I'm not asking for anything from you, Sam. Nothing; that means advice, see?"

"You're gettin' it?" he flared. "You and your seeanses

We heard about you. Hanging up widow-women for fifty bucks a throw to talk to their 'dear departed'! P-sykik investigator! What a line! Go on, beat it!"

I had a leg to stand on now "A phony, huh? Why I'll bet I could put a haunt on you that would make that hair of yours stand up on end, if you have guts enough to go where I tell you to"

"You'll bet? That's a laugh. Listen at that, gang" He laughed, then turned to me and talked through one side of his mouth. "All right, you wanted it Come on, rich guy, you're called Fred'll hold stakes How about ten of your lousy bucks for every one of mine? Here, Fred—hold this sawbuck"

"I'll give you twenty to one," I said half hysterically. "And I'll take you to a place where you'll run up against the homeliest, plumb-meanest old haunt you ever heard of"

The crowd roared Sam laughed with them, but didn't try to back out With any of that gang, a bet was a bet. He'd taken me up, and he'd set odds, and he was bound I just nodded and put two century notes into Fred Bellew's hand. Fred and Sam climbed into the car, and just as we started, Sam leaned out and waved

"See you in hell, fellas," he said "I'm goin' to raise me a ghost, and one of us is going to scare the other one to death!"

I honked my horn to drown out the whooping and hollering from the sidewalk and got out of there I turned up the parkway and headed out of town

"Where to?" Fred asked after a while.

"Stick around," I said, not knowing

There must be some place not far from here where I could find an honest-to-God haunt, I thought, one that would make Sam back-track and set me up with the boys again I opened the compartment in the dashboard and let Ikey out Ikey was a little twisted imp who'd got his tail caught in between two sheets of steel when they were assembling the car, and had to stay there until it was junked

"Hey, Ike," I whispered He looked up, the gleam of the compartment light shining redly in his bright little eyes "Whistle for the professor, will you? I don't want to yell for him because those mugs in the back seat will hear me They can't hear you."

"O K , boss," he said, and putting his fingers to his lips, he gave vent to a blood-curdling, howling scream

That was the prof's call-letters, as it were The old man flew ahead of the car, circled around and slid in beside me through the window, which I'd opened a crack for him.

"My goodness," he panted, "I wish you wouldn't summon me to a location which is traveling with this high degree of celerity It was all I could do to catch up with you "

"Don't give me that, Professor," I whispered "You can catch a stratospheric if you want to Say, I have a guy in the back who wants to get a real scare from a ghost. Know of any around here?"

The professor put on his ghostly pince-nez "Why, yes. Remember my telling you about the Wolfmeyer place?"

"Golly—he's bad "

"He'll serve your purpose admirably But don't ask me to go there with you None of us ever associates with Wolfmeyer And for heaven's sake, be careful "

"I guess I can handle him Where is it?"

He gave me explicit directions, bade me good night and left. I was a little surprised, the professor traveled around with me a great deal, and I'd never seen him refuse a chance to see some new scenery I shrugged it off and went my way. I guess I just didn't know any better

I headed out of town and into the country to a certain old farmhouse Wolfmeyer, a Pennsylvania Dutchman, had hung himself there He had been, and was, a bad egg Instead of being a nice guy about it all, he was the rebel type He knew perfectly well that unless he did plenty of good to make up for the evil, he'd be stuck where he was for the rest of eternity That didn't seem to bother him at all He got surly and became a really bad spook Eight people had died in that house since the old man rotted off his own rope Three of them were tenants who had rented the place, and three were hobos, and two were psychic investigators They'd all hung themselves That's the way Wolfmeyer worked I think he really enjoyed haunting He certainly was thorough about it anyway

I didn't want to do any real harm to Happy Sam I just wanted to teach him a lesson And look what happened!

We reached the place just before midnight. No one had said much, except that I told Fred and Sam about Wolfmeyer, and pretty well what was to be expected from him. They did a good deal of laughing about it, so I just shut up and drove. The next item of conversation was Fred's, when he made the terms of the bet. To win, Sam was to stay in the house until dawn. He wasn't to call for help and he wasn't to leave. He had to bring in a coil of rope, tie a noose in one end and string the other up on "Wolfmeyer's Beam"—the great oaken beam on which the old man had hung himself, and eight others after him. This was an added temptation to Wolfmeyer to work on Happy Sam, and was my idea. I was to go in with Sam, to watch him in case the thing became too dangerous. Fred was to stay in the car a hundred yards down the road and wait.

I parked the car at the agreed distance and Sam and I got out. Sam had my tow rope over his shoulder, already noosed. Fred had quieted down considerably, and his face was dead serious.

"I don't think I like this," he said, looking up the road at the house. It hunched back from the highway, and looked like a malign being deep in thought.

I said, "Well, Sam? Want to pay up now and call it quits?"

He followed Fred's gaze. It sure was a dreary-looking place, and his liquor had fizzed away. He thought a minute, then shrugged and grinned. I had to admire the rat. "Hell, I'll go through with it. Can't bluff me with scenery, phony."

Surprisingly, Fred piped up, "I don't think he's a phony, Sam."

The resistance made Sam stubborn, though I could see by his face that he knew better. "Come on, phony," he said and swung up the road.

We climbed into the house by way of a cellar door that slanted up to a window on the first floor. I hauled out a flashlight and lit the way to the beam. It was only one of many that delighted in turning the sound of one's footsteps into laughing whispers that ran round and round the rooms and halls and would not die. Under the famous beam the dusty floor was dark-stained.

I gave Sam a hand in fixing the rope, and then clicked off

the light. It must have been tough on him then. I didn't mind, because I knew I could see anything before it got to me, and even then, no ghost could see me. Not only that, for me the walls and floors and ceilings were lit with the phosphorescent many-hued glow of the ever-present ghost plants. For its eerie effect I wished Sam could see the ghost-molds feeding greedily on the stain under the beam.

Sam was already breathing heavily, but I knew it would take more than just darkness and silence to get his goat. He'd have to be alone, and then he'd have to have a visitor or so.

"So long, kid," I said, slapping him on the shoulder, and I turned and walked out of the room.

I let him hear me go out of the house and then I crept silently back. It was without doubt the most deserted place I have ever seen. Even ghosts kept away from it, excepting, of course, Wolfmeyer's. There was just the luxurious vegetation, invisible to all but me, and the deep silence rippled by Sam's breath. After ten minutes or so I knew for certain that Happy Sam had more guts than I'd ever have credited him with. He had to be scared. He couldn't—or wouldn't—scare himself.

I crouched down against the walls of an adjoining room and made myself comfortable. I figured Wolfmeyer would be along pretty soon. I hoped earnestly that I could stop the thing before it got too far. No use in making this any more than a good lesson for a wiseacre. I was feeling pretty smug about it all, and I was totally unprepared for what happened.

I was looking toward the doorway opposite when I realized that for some minutes there had been the palest of pale glows there. It brightened as I watched, brightened and flickered gently. It was green, the green of things moldy and rotting away, and with it came a subtly harrowing stench. It was the smell of flesh so very dead that it had ceased to be really odorous. It was utterly horrible, and I was honestly scared out of my wits. It was some moments before the comforting thought of my invulnerability came back to me, and I shrank lower and closer to the wall and watched.

And Wolfmeyer came in.

His was the ghost of an old, old man. He wore a flowing,

filthy robe, and his bare forearms thrust out in front of him were stringy and strong His head, with its tangled hair and beard, quivered on a broken, ruined neck like the blade of a knife just thrown into soft wood Each slow step as he crossed the room set his head to quivering again His eyes were alight, red they were, with deep green flames buried in them His canine teeth had lengthened into yellow, blunt tusks, and they were like pillars supporting his crooked grin The putrescent green glow was a horrid halo about him. He was a bright and evil thing

He passed me completely unconscious of my presence and paused at the door of the room where Sam waited by the rope He stood just outside it, his claws extended, the quivering of his head slowly dying He stared in at Sam, and suddenly opened his mouth and howled It was a quiet, deadly sound, one that might have come from the throat of a distant dog, but, though I couldn't see into the other room, I knew that Sam had jerked his head around and was staring at the ghost. Wolfmeyer raised his arms a trifle, seemed to totter a bit, and then moved into the room

I snapped myself out of the crawling terror that gripped me and scrambled to my feet If I didn't move fast—

Tiptoeing swiftly to the door, I stopped just long enough to see Wolfmeyer beating his arms about erratically over his head, a movement that made his robe flutter and his whole figure pulsate in the green light, just long enough to see Sam on his feet, wide-eyed, staggering back and back toward the rope He clutched his throat and opened his mouth and made no sound, and his head tilted, his neck bent, his twisted face gaped at the ceiling as he clumped backward away from the ghost and into the ready noose. And then I leaned over Wolfmeyer's shoulder, put my lips to his ear, and said.

"Boo!"

I almost laughed Wolfmeyer gave a little squeak, jumped about ten feet, and, without stopping to look around, high-tailed out of the room so fast that he was just a blur That was one scared old spook!

At the same time Happy Sam straightened, his face relaxed and relieved, and sat down with a bump under the noose That was as close a thing as ever I want to see He sat

there, his face soaking wet with cold sweat, his hands between his knees, staring limply at his feet

"That'll show you!" I exulted, and walked over to him
"Pay up, scum, and you may starve for that week's pay!" He
didn't move I guess he was plenty shocked

"Come on!" I said "Pull yourself together, man! Haven't
you seen enough? That old fellow will be back any second
now On your feet!"

He didn't move

"Sam!"

He didn't move

"Sam!" I clutched at his shoulder He pitched over sideways and lay still He was quite dead

I didn't do anything and for a while I didn't say anything
Then I said hopelessly, as I knelt there, "Aw, Sam Sam—
cut it out, fella"

After a minute I rose slowly and started for the door I'd
taken three steps when I stopped Something was happening!
I rubbed my hand over my eyes Yes, it is—it was getting
dark! The vague luminescence of the vines and flowers of the
ghost world was getting dimmer, fading, fading—

But that had never happened before!

No difference I told myself desperately, it's happening
now, all right *I got to get out of here!*

See? You see It was the stuff—the damn stuff from the
Shottle Bop It was wearing off! When Sam died it it
stopped working on me! Was this what I had to pay for the
bottle? Was this what was to happen if I used it for revenge?

The light was almost gone—and now it was gone I couldn't
see a thing in the room but one of the doors Why could I
see the doorway? What was that pale-green light that set off
its dusty frame?

Wolfmeyer! I got to get out of here!

I couldn't see ghosts any more Ghosts could see me now
I ran I darted across the dark room and smashed into the
wall on the other side I reeled back from it, blood spouting
from between the fingers I slapped to my face I ran again
Another wall clubbed me Where was that other door? I ran
again, and again struck a wall I screamed and ran again.
I tripped over Sam's body My head went through the noose

It whipped down on my windpipe, and my neck broke with an agonizing crunch. I floundered there for half a minute, and then dangled

Dead as hell, I was Wolfmeyer, he laughed and laughed.

Fred found me and Sam in the morning He took our bodies away in the car. Now I've got to stay here and haunt this damn old house Me and Wolfmeyer.

H. H. Munro ("Saki")

Gabriel-Ernest

"There is a wild beast in your woods," said the artist Cunningham, as he was being driven to the station. It was the only remark he had made during the drive, but as Van Cheele had talked incessantly his companion's silence had not been noticeable.

"A stray fox or two and some resident weasels. Nothing more formidable," said Van Cheele. The artist said nothing.

"What did you mean about a wild beast?" said Van Cheele later, when they were on the platform.

"Nothing. My imagination. Here is the train," said Cunningham.

That afternoon Van Cheele went for one of his frequent rambles through his woodland property. He had a stuffed bittern in his study, and knew the names of quite a number of wild flowers, so his aunt had possibly some justification in describing him as a great naturalist. At any rate, he was a great walker. It was his custom to take mental notes of everything he saw during his walks, not so much for the purpose of assisting contemporary science as to provide topics for conversation afterwards. When the bluebells began to show themselves in flower he made a point of informing every one of the fact, the season of the year might have warned his hearers of the likelihood of such an occurrence, but at least they felt that he was being absolutely frank with them.

What Van Cheele saw on this particular afternoon was, however, something far removed from his ordinary range of experience. On a shelf of smooth stone overhanging a deep pool in the hollow of an oak coppice a boy of about sixteen lay asprawl, drying his wet brown limbs luxuriously in the sun. His wet hair, parted by a recent dive, lay close to his head, and his light-brown eyes, so light that there was an almost tigerish gleam in them, were turned towards Van Cheele.

with a certain lazy watchfulness It was an unexpected apparition, and Van Cheele found himself engaged in the novel process of thinking before he spoke Where on earth could this wild-looking boy hail from? The miller's wife had lost a child some two months ago, supposed to have been swept away by the mill-race, but that had been a mere baby, not a half-grown lad

“What are you doing there?” he demanded

“Obviously, sunning myself,” replied the boy.

“Where do you live?”

“Here, in these woods”

“You can't live in the woods,” said Van Cheele

“They are very nice woods,” said the boy, with a touch of patronage in his voice

“But where do you sleep at night?”

“I don't sleep at night; that's my busiest time”

Van Cheele began to have an irritated feeling that he was grappling with a problem that was eluding him

“What do you feed on?” he asked

“Flesh,” said the boy, and he pronounced the word with slow relish, as though he were tasting it.

“Flesh! What flesh?”

“Since it interests you, rabbits, wild-fowl, hares, poultry, lambs in their season, children when I can get any, they're usually too well locked in at night, when I do most of my hunting It's quite two months since I tasted child-flesh”

Ignoring the chaffing nature of the last remark Van Cheele tried to draw the boy on the subject of possible poaching operations.

“You're talking rather through your hat when you speak of feeding on hares” (Considering the nature of the boy's toilet the simile was hardly an apt one) “Our hillside hares aren't easily caught.”

“At night I hunt on four feet,” was the somewhat cryptic response

“I suppose you mean that you hunt with a dog?” hazarded Van Cheele

The boy rolled slowly over on to his back, and laughed a weird low laugh, that was pleasantly like a chuckle and disagreeably like a snarl.

"I don't fancy any dog would be very anxious for my company, especially at night"

Van Cheele began to feel that there was something positively uncanny about the strange-eyed, strange-tongued youngster

"I can't have you staying in these woods," he declared authoritatively

"I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house," said the boy

The prospect of this wild, nude animal in Van Cheele's primly ordered house was certainly an alarming one

"If you don't go I shall have to make you," said Van Cheele

The boy turned like a flash, plunged into the pool, and in a moment had flung his wet and glistening body half-way up the bank where Van Cheele was standing. In an otter the movement would not have been remarkable, in a boy Van Cheele found it sufficiently startling. His foot slipped as he made an involuntary backward movement, and he found himself almost prostrate on the slippery weed-grown bank, with those tigerish yellow eyes not very far from his own. Almost instinctively he half raised his hand to his throat. The boy laughed again, a laugh in which the snarl had nearly driven out the chuckle, and then, with another of his astonishing lightning movements, plunged out of view into a yielding tangle of weed and fern.

"What an extraordinary wild animal!" said Van Cheele as he picked himself up. And then he recalled Cunningham's remark, "There is a wild beast in your woods."

Walking slowly homeward, Van Cheele began to turn over in his mind various local occurrences which might be traceable to the existence of this astonishing young savage.

Something had been thinning the game in the woods lately, poultry had been missing from the farms, hares were growing unaccountably scarcer, and complaints had reached him of lambs being carried off bodily from the hills. Was it possible that this wild boy was really hunting the countryside in company with some clever poacher dog? He had spoken of hunting "four-footed" by night, but then, again, he had hinted strangely at no dog caring to come near him, "especially at

night" It was certainly puzzling. And then, as Van Cheele ran his mind over the various depredations that had been committed during the last month or two, he came suddenly to a dead stop, alike in his walk and his speculations. The child missing from the mill two months ago—the accepted theory was that it had tumbled into the mill-race and been swept away, but the mother had always declared she had heard a shriek on the hill side of the house, in the opposite direction from the water. It was unthinkable, of course, but he wished that the boy had not made that uncanny remark about child-flesh eaten two months ago. Such dreadful things should not be said even in fun.

Van Cheele, contrary to his usual wont, did not feel disposed to be communicative about his discovery in the wood. His position as a parish councillor and justice of the peace seemed somehow compromised by the fact that he was harbouring a personality of such doubtful repute on his property, there was even a possibility that a heavy bill of damages for raided lambs and poultry might be laid at his door. At dinner that night he was quite unusually silent.

"Where's your voice gone to?" said his aunt. "One would think you had seen a wolf."

Van Cheele, who was not familiar with the old saying, thought the remark rather foolish, if he *had* seen a wolf on his property his tongue would have been extraordinarily busy with the subject.

At breakfast next morning Van Cheele was conscious that his feeling of uneasiness regarding yesterday's episode had not wholly disappeared, and he resolved to go by train to the neighbouring cathedral town, hunt up Cunningham, and learn from him what he had really seen that had prompted the remark about a wild beast in the woods. With this resolution taken, his usual cheerfulness partially returned, and he hummed a bright little melody as he sauntered to the morning-room for his customary cigarette. As he entered the room the melody made way abruptly for a pious invocation. Gracefully asprawl on the ottoman, in an attitude of almost exaggerated repose, was the boy of the woods. He was drier than when Van Cheele had last seen him, but no other alteration was noticeable in his toilet.

"How dare you come here?" asked Van Cheele furiously

"You told me I was not to stay in the woods," said the boy calmly

"But not to come here Supposing my aunt should see you!"

And with a view to minimizing that catastrophe Van Cheele hastily obscured as much of his unwelcome guest as possible under the folds of a *Morning Post* At that moment his aunt entered the room.

"This is a poor boy who has lost his way—and lost his memory He doesn't know who he is or where he comes from," explained Van Cheele desperately, glancing apprehensively at the waif's face to see whether he was going to add inconvenient candour to his other savage propensities

Miss Van Cheele was enormously interested

"Perhaps his underlinen is marked," she suggested

"He seems to have lost most of that, too," said Van Cheele, making frantic little grabs at the *Morning Post* to keep it in its place

A naked homeless child appealed to Miss Van Cheele as warmly as a stray kitten or derelict puppy would have done

"We must do all we can for him," she decided, and in a very short time a messenger, dispatched to the rectory, where a pageboy was kept, had returned with a suit of pantry clothes, and the necessary accessories of shirt, shoes, collar, etc Clothed, clean, and groomed, the boy lost none of his uncanniness in Van Cheele's eyes, but his aunt found him sweet

"We must call him something till we know who he really is," she said "Gabriel-Ernest, I think, those are nice suitable names"

Van Cheele agreed, but he privately doubted whether they were being grafted on to a nice suitable child His misgivings were not diminished by the fact that his staid and elderly spaniel had bolted out of the house at the first incoming of the boy, and now obstinately remained shivering and yapping at the farther end of the orchard, while the canary, usually as vocally industrious as Van Cheele himself, had put itself on an allowance of frightened cheeps More than ever he was resolved to consult Cunningham without loss of time

As he drove off to the station his aunt was arranging that Gabriel-Ernest should help her to entertain the infant members of her Sunday-school class at tea that afternoon.

Cunningham was not at first disposed to be communicative

"My mother died of some brain trouble," he explained, "so you will understand why I am averse to dwelling on anything of an impossibly fantastic nature that I may see or think that I have seen."

"But what *did* you see?" persisted Van Cheele

"What I thought I saw was something so extraordinary that no really sane man could dignify it with the credit of having actually happened I was standing, the last evening I was with you, half-hidden in the hedgegrowth by the orchard gate, watching the dying glow of the sunset Suddenly I became aware of a naked boy, a bather from some neighbouring pool, I took him to be, who was standing out on the bare hillside also watching the sunset His pose was so suggestive of some wild faun of Pagan myth that I instantly wanted to engage him as a model, and in another moment I think I should have hailed him But just then the sun dipped out of view, and all the orange and pink slid out of the landscape, leaving it cold and grey And at the same moment an astounding thing happened—the boy vanished too!"

"What vanished away into nothing?" asked Van Cheele excitedly

"No, that is the dreadful part of it," answered the artist, "on the open hillside where the boy had been standing a second ago, stood a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes You may think—"

But Van Cheele did not stop for anything as futile as thought Already he was tearing at top speed towards the station He dismissed the idea of a telegram "Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf" was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation, and his aunt would think it was a code message to which he had omitted to give her the key His one hope was that he might reach home before sundown The cab which he chartered at the other end of the railway journey bore him with what seemed exasperating slowness along the country roads, which were pink and mauve with the flush

of the sinking sun His aunt was putting away some unfinished jams and cake when he arrived

"Where is Gabriel-Ernest?" he almost screamed

"He is taking the little Toop child home," said his aunt. "It was getting so late, I thought it wasn't safe to let it go back alone What a lovely sunset, isn't it?"

But Van Cheele, although not oblivious of the glow in the western sky, did not stay to discuss its beauties At a speed for which he was scarcely geared he raced along the narrow lane that led to the home of the Toops On one side ran the swift current of the mill-stream, on the other rose the stretch of bare hillside A dwindling rim of red sun showed still on the skyline, and the next turning must bring him in view of the ill-assorted couple he was pursuing Then the colour went suddenly out of things, and a grey light settled itself with a quick shiver over the landscape Van Cheele heard a shrill wail of fear, and stopped running

Nothing was ever seen again of the Toop child or Gabriel-Ernest, but the latter's discarded garments were found lying in the road, so it was assumed that the child had fallen into the water, and that the boy had stripped and jumped in, in a vain endeavour to save it. Van Cheele and some workmen who were near by at the time testified to having heard a child scream loudly just near the spot where the clothes were found Mrs Toop, who had eleven other children, was decently resigned to her bereavement, but Miss Van Cheele sincerely mourned her lost foundling It was on her initiative that a memorial brass was put up in the parish church to "Gabriel-Ernest, an unknown boy, who bravely sacrificed his life for another "

Van Cheele gave way to his aunt in most things, but he flatly refused to subscribe to the Gabriel-Ernest memorial

The Lost Room

It was oppressively warm. The sun had long disappeared, but seemed to have left its vital spirit of heat behind it. The air rested, the leaves of the acacia-trees that shrouded my windows hung plumb-like on their delicate stalks. The smoke of my cigar scarce rose above my head, but hung about me in a pale blue cloud, which I had to dissipate with languid waves of my hand. My shirt was open at the throat, and my chest heaved laboriously in the effort to catch some breaths of fresher air. The noises of the city seemed to be wrapped in slumber, and the shrilling of the mosquitoes was the only sound that broke the stillness.

As I lay with my feet elevated on the back of a chair, wrapped in that peculiar frame of mind in which thought assumes a species of lifeless motion, the strange fancy seized me of making a languid inventory of the principal articles of furniture in my room. It was a task well suited to the mood in which I found myself. Their forms were duskily defined in the dim twilight that floated shadowily through the chamber; it was no labor to note and particularize each, and from the place where I sat I could command a view of all my possessions without even turning my head.

There was, *imprimis*, that ghostly lithograph by Calame. It was a mere black spot on the white wall, but my inner vision scrutinized every detail of the picture. A wild, desolate, midnight heath, with a spectral oak-tree in the centre of the foreground. The wind blows fiercely, and the jagged branches, clothed scantily with ill-grown leaves, are swept to the left continually by its giant force. A formless wrack of clouds streams across the awful sky, and the rain sweeps almost parallel with the horizon. Beyond, the heath stretches off into endless blackness, in the extreme of which either fancy or art has conjured up some undefinable shapes that seem riding into space. At the base of the huge oak stands a

shrouded figure His mantle is wound by the blast in tight folds around his form, and the long cock's feather in his hat is blown upright, till it seems as if it stood on end with fear His features are not visible, for he has grasped his cloak with both hands, and drawn it from either side across his face The picture is seemingly objectless It tells no tale, but there is a weird power about it that haunts one

Next to the picture comes the round blot that hangs below it, which I know to be a smoking-cap It has my coat of arms embroidered on the front, and for that reason I never wear it, though, when properly arranged on my head, with its long blue silken tassel hanging down by my cheek, I believe it becomes me well I remember the time when it was in the course of manufacture I remember the tiny little hands that pushed the colored silks so nimbly through the cloth that was stretched on the embroidery-frame,—the vast trouble I was put to to get a colored copy of my armorial bearings for the heraldic work which was to decorate the front of the band, the pursings up of the little mouth, and the contractions of the young forehead, as their possessor plunged into a profound sea of cogitation touching the way in which the cloud should be represented from which the armed hand, that is my crest, issues,—the heavenly moment when the tiny hands placed it on my head, in a position that I could not bear for more than a few seconds, and I, king-like, immediately assumed my royal prerogative after the coronation, and instantly levied a tax on my only subject, which was, however, not paid unwillingly Ah, the cap is there, but the embroiderer has fled, for Atropos was severing the web of life above her head while she was weaving that silken shelter for mine!

How uncouthly the huge piano that occupies the corner at the left of the door looms out in the uncertain twilight! I neither play nor sing, yet I own a piano It is a comfort to me to look at it, and to feel that the music is there, although I am not able to break the spell that binds it It is pleasant to know that Bellini and Mozart, Cimarosa, Porpora, Gluck, and all such,—or at least their souls,—sleep in that unwieldy case There lie embalmed, as it were, all operas, sonatas, oratorios, nocturnos, marches, songs, and dances, that ever climbed

into existence through the four bars that wall in a melody. Once I was entirely repaid for the investment of my funds in that instrument which I never use Blokecta, the composer, came to see me. Of course his instincts urged him as irresistibly to my piano as if some magnetic power lay within it compelling him to approach. He tuned it, he played on it. All night long, until the gray and spectral dawn rose out of the depths of the midnight, he sat and played, and I lay smoking by the window listening. Wild, unearthly, and sometimes insufferably painful, were the improvisations of Blokecta. The chords of the instrument seemed breaking with anguish. Lost souls shrieked in his dismal preludes; the half-heard utterances of spirits in pain, that groped at inconceivable distances from anything lovely or harmonious, seemed to rise dimly up out of the waves of sound that gathered under his hands. Melancholy human love wandered out on distant heaths, or beneath dank and gloomy cypresses, murmuring its unanswered sorrow, or hateful gnomes sported and sang in the stagnant swamps, triumphing in unearthly tones over the knight whom they had lured to his death. Such was Blokecta's night's entertainment, and when he at length closed the piano, and hurried away through the cold morning, he left a memory about the instrument from which I could never escape.

Those snowshoes that hang in the space between the mirror and the door recall Canadian wanderings,—a long race through the dense forests, over the frozen snow, through whose brittle crust the slender hoofs of the caribou that we were pursuing sank at every step, until the poor creature despairingly turned at bay in a small juniper coppice, and we heartlessly shot him down. And I remember how Gabriel, the *habitant*, and François, the half-breed, cut his throat, and how the hot blood rushed out in a torrent over the snowy soil; and I recall the snow *cabane* that Gabriel built, where we all three slept so warmly, and the great fire that glowed at our feet, painting all kinds of demoniac shapes on the black screen of forest that lay without, and the deersteaks that we roasted for our breakfast; and the savage drunkenness of Gabriel in the morning, he having been privately drinking out of my brandy-flask all the night long.

That long, haftless dagger that dangles over the mantelpiece makes my heart swell I found it, when a boy, in a hoary old castle in which one of my maternal ancestors once lived. That same ancestor—who, by the way, yet lives in history—was a strange old sea-king, who dwelt on the extremest point of the southwestern coast of Ireland He owned the whole of that fertile island called Inniskearan, which directly faces Cape Clear, where between them the Atlantic rolls furiously, forming what the fishermen of the place call “the Sound” An awful place in winter is that same Sound On certain days no boat can live there for a moment, and Cape Clear is frequently cut off for days from any communication with the mainland

This old sea-king—Sir Florence O'Driscoll by name—passed a stormy life From the summit of his castle he watched the ocean, and when any richly laden vessels, bound from the south to the industrious Galway merchants, hove in sight, Sir Florence hoisted the sails of his galley, and it went hard with him if he did not tow into harbor ship and crew In this way, he lived, not a very honest mode of livelihood, certainly, according to our modern ideas, but quite reconcilable with the morals of the time As may be supposed, Sir Florence got into trouble Complaints were laid against him at the English court by the plundered merchants, and the Irish viking set out for London, to plead his own cause before good Queen Bess, as she was called He had one powerful recommendation he was a marvelously handsome man Not Celtic by descent, but half Spanish, half Danish in blood, he had the great northern stature with the regular features, flashing eyes, and dark hair of the Iberian race This may account for the fact that his stay at the English court was much longer than was necessary, as also for the tradition, which a local historian mentions, that the English Queen evinced a preference for the Irish chieftain, of other nature than that usually shown by monarch to subject.

Previous to his departure, Sir Florence had intrusted the care of his property to an Englishman named Hull During the long absence of the knight, this person managed to ingratiate himself with the local authorities, and gain their favor so far that they were willing to support him in almost

any scheme. After a protracted stay, Sir Florence, pardoned of all his misdeeds, returned to his home. Home no longer. Hull was in possession, and refused to yield an acre of the lands he had so nefariously acquired. It was no use appealing to the law, for its officers were in the opposite interest. It was no use appealing to the Queen, for she had another lover, and had forgotten the poor Irish knight by this time, and so the viking passed the best portion of his life in unsuccessful attempts to reclaim his vast estates, and was eventually, in his old age, obliged to content himself with his castle by the sea and the island of Inniskeiran, the only spot of which the usurper was unable to deprive him. So this old story of my kinsman's fate looms up out of the darkness that enshrouds that haftless dagger hanging on the wall.

It was somewhat after the foregoing fashion that I dreamily made the inventory of my personal property. As I turned my eyes on each object, one after the other,—or the places where they lay, for the room was now so dark that it was almost impossible to see with any distinctness,—a crowd of memories connected with each rose up before me, and, perforce, I had to indulge them. So I proceeded but slowly, and at last my cigar shortened to a hot and bitter morsel that I could barely hold between my lips, while it seemed to me that the night grew each moment more insufferably oppressive. While I was revolving some impossible means of cooling my wretched body, the cigar stump began to burn my lips. I flung it angrily through the open window, and stooped out to watch it falling. It first lighted on the leaves of the acacia, sending out a spray of red sparkles, then, rolling off, it fell plump on the dark walk in the garden, faintly illuminating for a moment the dusky trees and breathless flowers. Whether it was the contrast between the red flash of the cigar-stump and the silent darkness of the garden, or whether it was that I detected by the sudden light a faint waving of the leaves, I know not, but something suggested to me that the garden was cool. I will take a turn there, thought I, just as I am, it cannot be warmer than this room, and however still the atmosphere, there is always a feeling of liberty and spaciousness in the open air, that partially supplies one's wants. With this idea running through my head, I arose, lit another

cigar, and passed out into the long, intricate corridors that led to the main staircase As I crossed the threshold of my room, with what a different feeling I should have passed it had I known that I was never to set foot in it again!

I lived in a very large house, in which I occupied two rooms on the second floor The house was old-fashioned, and all the floors communicated by a huge circular staircase that wound up through the centre of the building, while at every landing long, rambling corridors stretched off into mysterious nooks and corners This palace of mine was very high, and its resources, in the way of crannies and windings, seemed to be interminable Nothing seemed to stop anywhere Cul-de-sacs were unknown on the premises The corridors and passages, like mathematical lines, seemed capable of indefinite extensions, and the object of the architect must have been to erect an edifice in which people might go ahead forever The whole place was gloomy, not so much because it was large, but because an unearthly nakedness seemed to pervade the structure The staircases, corridors, halls, and vestibules all partook of a desert-like desolation There was nothing on the walls to break the sombre monotony of those long vistas of shade No carvings on the wainscoting, no moulded masks peering down from the simple severe cornices, no marble vases on the landings There was an eminent dreariness and want of life—so rare in an American establishment—all over the abode It was Hood's haunted house put in order and newly painted The servants, too, were shadowy, and chary of their visits Bells rang three times before the gloomy chambermaid could be induced to present herself, and the Negro waiter, a ghoul-like-looking creature from Congo, obeyed the summons only when one's patience was exhausted or one's want satisfied in some other way When he did come, one felt sorry that he had not stayed away altogether, so sullen and savage did he appear He moved along the echoless floors with a slow, noiseless shamble, until his dusky figure, advancing from the gloom, seemed like some reluctant afreet, compelled by the superior power of his master to disclose himself When the doors of all the chambers were closed, and no light illuminated the long corridor save the red, unwholesome glare of a small oil lamp on a table at the

end, where late lodgers lit their candles, one could not by any possibility conjure up a sadder or more desolate prospect

Yet the house suited me. Of meditative and sedentary habits, I enjoyed the extreme quiet. There were but few lodgers, from which I infer that the landlord did not drive a very thriving trade; and these, probably oppressed by the sombre spirit of the place, were quiet and ghost-like in their movements. The proprietor I scarcely ever saw. My bills were deposited by unseen hands every month on my table, while I was out walking or riding, and my pecuniary response was intrusted to the attendant a-fret. On the whole, when the bustling wide-awake spirit of New York is taken into consideration, the sombre, half-vivified character of the house in which I lived was an anomaly that no one appreciated better than I who lived there.

I felt my way down the wide, dark staircase in my pursuit of zephyrs. The garden, as I entered it, did feel somewhat cooler than my own room, and I puffed my cigar along the dim, cypress-shrouded walks with a sensation of comparative relief. It was very dark. The tall-growing flowers that bordered the path were so wrapped in gloom as to present the aspect of solid pyramidal masses, all the details of leaves and blossoms being buried in an embracing darkness, while the trees had lost all form, and seemed like masses of overhanging cloud. It was a place and time to excite the imagination, for in the impenetrable cavities of endless gloom there was room for the most riotous fancies to play at will. I walked and walked, and the echoes of my footsteps on the ungravelled and mossy path suggested a double feeling. I felt alone and yet in company at the same time. The solitariness of the place made itself distinct enough in the stillness, broken alone by the hollow reverberations of my step, while those very reverberations seemed to imbue me with an undefined feeling that I was not alone. I was not, therefore, much startled when I was suddenly accosted from beneath the solid darkness of an immense cypress by a voice saying, "Will you give me a light, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied, trying in vain to distinguish the speaker amidst the impenetrable dark.

Somebody advanced, and I held out my cigar. All I could gather definitely about the individual who thus accosted me was that he must have been of extremely small stature; for I, who am by no means an overgrown man, had to stoop considerably in handing him my cigar. The vigorous puff that he gave his own lighted up my Havana for a moment, and I fancied that I caught a glimpse of a pale, weird countenance, immersed in a background of long, wild hair. The flash was, however, so momentary that I could not even say certainly whether this was an actual impression or the mere effort of imagination to embody that which the senses had failed to distinguish.

"Sir, you are out late," said this unknown to me, as he, with half-uttered thanks, handed me back my cigar, for which I had to grope in the gloom.

"Not later than usual," I replied dryly.

"Hum! you are fond of late wanderings, then?"

"That is just as the fancy seizes me."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes"

"Queer house, isn't it?"

"I have only found it quiet."

"Hum! But you *will* find it queer, take my word for it." This was earnestly uttered, and I felt at the same time a bony finger laid on my arm, that cut it sharply like a blunted knife.

"I cannot take your word for any such assertion," I replied, rudely, shaking off the bony finger with an irrepressible motion of disgust.

"No offence, no offence," muttered my unseen companion rapidly, in a strange, subdued voice, that would have been shrill had it been louder, "your being angry does not alter the matter. You will find it a queer house. Everybody finds it a queer house. Do you know who live there?"

"I never busy myself, sir, about other people's affairs," I answered sharply, for the individual's manner, combined with my utter uncertainty as to his appearance, oppressed me with an irksome longing to be rid of him.

"O, you don't?" Well, I do. I know what they are,—well, well, well!" and as he pronounced the three last words his voice

rose with each, until, with the last, it reached a shrill shriek that echoed horribly among the lonely walks. "Do you know what they eat?" he continued.

"No sir,—nor care."

"O, but you will care. You must care. You shall care. I'll tell you what they are. They are enchanters. They are ghouls. They are cannibals. Did you never remark their eyes, and how they gloated on you when you passed? Did you never remark the food that they served up at your table? Did you never in the dead of night hear muffled and unearthly footsteps gliding along the corridors, and stealthy hands turning the handle of your door? Does not some magnetic influence fold itself continually around you when they pass, and send a thrill through spirit and body, and a cold shiver that no sunshine will chase away? O, you have! You have felt all these things! I know it!"

The earnest rapidity, the subdued tones, the eagerness of accent, with which all this was uttered, impressed me most uncomfortably. It really seemed as if I could recall all those weird occurrences and influences of which he spoke, and I shuddered in spite of myself in the midst of the impenetrable darkness that surrounded me.

"Hum!" said I, assuming, without knowing it, a confidential tone, "may I ask how you know these things?"

"How I know them? Because I am their enemy, because they tremble at my whisper, because I follow upon their track with the perseverance of a bloodhound and the stealthiness of a tiger, because—because—I was *of* them once!"

"Wretch!" I cried excitedly, for involuntarily his eager tones had wrought me up to a high pitch of spasmodic nervousness, "then you mean to say that you—"

As I uttered this word, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stretched forth my hand in the direction of the speaker and made a blind clutch. The tips of my fingers seemed to touch a surface as smooth as glass, that glided suddenly from under them. A sharp, angry hiss sounded through the gloom, followed by a whirring noise, as if some projectile passed rapidly by, and the next moment I felt instinctively that I was alone.

A most disagreeable feeling instantly assailed me,—a pro-

phetic instinct that some terrible misfortune menaced me; an eager and overpowering anxiety to get back to my own room without loss of time I turned and ran blindly along the dark cypress alley, every dusky clump of flowers that rose blackly in the borders making my heart each moment cease to beat. The echoes of my own footsteps seemed to redouble and assume the sounds of unknown pursuers following fast upon my track The boughs of lilac bushes and syringas, that here and there stretched partly across the walk, seemed to have been furnished suddenly with hooked hands that sought to grasp me as I flew by, and each moment I expected to behold some awful and impassable barrier fall across my track and wall me up forever.

At length I reached the wide entrance With a single leap I sprang up the four or five steps that formed the stoop, and dashed along the hall, up the wide, echoing stairs, and again along the dim, funereal corridors until I paused, breathless and panting, at the door of my room Once so far, I stopped for an instant and leaned heavily against one of the panels, panting lustily after my late run I had, however, scarcely rested my whole weight against the door, when it suddenly gave way, and I staggered in head-foremost To my utter astonishment the room I had left in profound darkness was now a blaze of light So intense was the illumination that, for a few seconds while the pupils of my eyes were contracting under the sudden change, I saw absolutely nothing save the dazzling glare This fact in itself, coming on me with such utter suddenness, was sufficient to prolong my confusion, and it was not until after several minutes had elapsed that I perceived the room was not only illuminated, but occupied And such occupants! Amazement at the scene took such possession of me that I was incapable of either moving or uttering a word All that I could do was to lean against the wall, and stare blankly at the strange picture

It might have been a scene out of Faublas, or Grammont's Memoirs, or happened in some palace of Minister Fouque

Round a large table in the centre of the room, where I had left a student-like litter of books and papers, were seated a half a dozen persons Three were men and three were women The table was heaped with a prodigality of luxuries

Luscious eastern fruits were piled up in silver filigree vases, through whose meshes their glowing rinds shone in the contrasts of a thousand hues Small silver dishes that Benvenuto might have designed, filled with succulent and aromatic meats, were distributed upon a cloth of snowy damask. Bottles of every shape, slender ones from the Rhine, stout fellows from Holland, sturdy ones from Spain, and quaint basket-woven flasks from Italy, absolutely littered the board. Drinking-glasses of every size and hue filled up the interstices, and the thirsty German flagon stood side by side with the aerial bubbles of Venetian glass that rest so lightly on their thread-like stems An odor of luxury and sensuality floated through the apartment The lamps that burned in every direction seemed to diffuse a subtle incense on the air, and in a large vase that stood on the floor I saw a mass of magnolias, tuberoses, and jasmines grouped together, stifling each other with their honeyed and heavy fragrance.

The inhabitants of my room seemed beings well suited to so sensual an atmosphere. The women were strangely beautiful, and all were attired in dresses of the most fantastic devices and brilliant hues Their figures were round, supple, and elastic; their eyes dark and languishing; their lips full, ripe, and of the richest bloom. The three men wore half-masks, so that all I could distinguish were heavy jaws, pointed beards, and brawny throats that rose like massive pillars out of their doublets All six lay reclining on Roman couches about the table, drinking down the purple wines in large draughts, and tossing back their heads and laughing wildly.

I stood, I suppose, for some three minutes, with my back against the wall staring vacantly at the bacchanal vision, before any of the revelers appeared to notice my presence At length, without any expression to indicate whether I had been observed from the beginning or not, two of the women arose from their couches, and, approaching, took each a hand and led me to the table I obeyed their motions mechanically. I sat on a coach between them as they indicated. I unresistingly permitted them to wind their arms about my neck.

"You must drink," said one, pouring out a large glass of red wine, "here is Clos Vougeot of a rare vintage, and here,"

pushing a flask of amber-hued wine before me, "is Lachryma Christi"

"You must eat," said the other, drawing the silver dishes toward her "Here are cutlets stewed with olives, and here are slices of a *filet* stuffed with bruised sweet chestnuts",— and as she spoke, she, without waiting for a reply, proceeded to help me

The sight of the food recalled to me the warnings I had received in the garden This sudden effort of memory restored to me my other faculties at the same instant I sprang to my feet, thrusting the women from me with each hand.

"Demons!" I almost shouted, "I will have none of your accursed food I know you You are cannibals, you are ghouls, you are enchanters Begone, I tell you! Leave my room in peace!"

A shout of laughter from all six was the only effect that my passionate speech produced The men rolled on their couches, and their half-masks quivered with the convulsions of their mirth The women shrieked, and tossed the slender wine-glasses wildly aloft, and turned to me and flung themselves on my bosom fairly sobbing with laughter

"Yes," I continued, as soon as the noisy mirth had subsided, "yes, I say, leave my room instantly! I will have none of your unnatural orgies here!"

"His room!" shrieked the woman on my right.

"His room!" echoed she on my left

"His room! He calls it his room!" shouted the whole party, as they rolled once more into jocular convulsions

"How know you that it is your room?" said one of the men who sat opposite to me, at length, after the laughter had once more somewhat subsided

"How do I know?" I replied, indignantly "How do I know my own room? How could I mistake it, pray? There's my furniture—my piano—"

"He calls that a piano!" shouted my neighbors

The peculiar emphasis they laid on the word "piano" caused me to scrutinize the article I was indicating more thoroughly Up to this time, though utterly amazed at the entrance of these people into my chamber, and connecting them somewhat with the wild stories I had heard in the gar-

den, I still had a sort of indefinite idea that the whole thing was a masquerading freak got up in my absence, and that the bacchanalian orgy I was witnessing was nothing more than a portion of some elaborate hoax of which I was to be the victim. But when my eyes turned to the corner where I had left a huge and cumbrous piano, and beheld a vast and sombre organ lifting its fluted front to the very ceiling, and convinced myself, by a hurried process of memory, that it occupied the very spot in which I had left my own instrument, the little self-possession that I had left forsook me. I gazed around me bewildered.

In like manner everything was changed. In the place of that old haftless dagger, connected with so many historic associations personal to myself, I beheld a Turkish yataghan dangling by its belt of crimson silk, while the jewels in the hilt blazed as the lamplight played upon them. In the spot where hung my cherished smoking-cap, memorial of a buried love, a knightly casque was suspended, on the crest of which a golden dragon stood in the act of springing. That strange lithograph by Calame was no longer a lithograph, but it seemed to me that the portion of the wall which it had covered, of the exact shape and size, had been cut out, and, in place of the picture, a *real* scene on the same scale, and with real actors, was distinctly visible. The old oak was there, and the stormy sky was there, but I saw the branches of the oak sway with the tempest, and the clouds drive before the wind. The wanderer in his cloak was gone, but in his place I beheld a circle of wild figures, men and women, dancing with linked hands around the bole of the great tree, chanting some wild fragment of a song, to which the winds roared an unearthly chorus. The snowshoes, too, on whose sinewy woof I had sped for many days amidst Canadian wastes, had vanished, and in their place lay a pair of strange upcurled Turkish slippers.

All was changed. Wherever my eyes turned they missed familiar objects, yet encountered strange representatives. Still, in all the substitutes there seemed to me a reminiscence of what they replaced. They seemed only for a time transmuted into other shapes, and there lingered around them the atmosphere of what they once had been. Thus I could have

sworn the room to have been mine, yet there was nothing in it that I could rightly claim

"Well, have you determined whether or not this is your room?" asked the girl on my left, proffering me a huge tumbler creaming over with champagne, and laughing wickedly as she spoke

"It is mine," I answered, doggedly, striking the glass rudely with my hand, and dashing the aromatic wine over the white cloth

"Hush! hush!" she said, gently, not in the least angered at my rough treatment. "You are excited Alf shall play something to soothe you "

At her signal, one of the men sat down at the organ. After a short, wild, spasmodic prelude, he began what seemed to me to be a symphony of recollections Dark and sombre, and all through full of quivering and intense agony, it appeared to recall a dark and dismal night, on a cold reef, around which an unseen but terribly audible ocean broke with eternal fury. It seemed as if a lonely pair were on the reef, one living, the other dead, one clasping his arms around the tender neck and naked bosom of the other, striving to warm her into life, when his own vitality was being each moment sucked from him by the icy breath of the storm. Here and there a terrible wailing minor key would tremble through the chords like the shriek of seabirds, or the warning of advancing death. While the man played I could scarce restrain myself It seemed to be Blokeeta whom I listened to, and on whom I gazed That wondrous night of pleasure and pain that I had once passed listening to him seemed to have been taken up again at the spot where it had broken off, and the same hand was continuing it. I stared at the man called Alf There he sat with his cloak and doublet, and long rapier and mask of black velvet. But there was something in the air of the peaked beard, a familiar mystery in the wild mass of raven hair that fell as if wind-blown over his shoulders, which riveted my memory.

"Blokeeta! Blokeetal" I shouted, starting up furiously from the couch on which I was lying, and bursting the fair arms that were linked around my neck as if they had been hateful chains,—"Blokeeta! my friend! speak to me, I entreat you! Tell these horrid enchanters to leave me Say that

I hate them. Say that I command them to leave my room."

The man at the organ stirred not in answer to my appeal. He ceased playing, and the dying sound of the last note he had touched faded off into a melancholy moan.

"Why will you persist in calling this your room?" said the woman next me, with a smile meant to be kind, but to me unexpressibly loathsome. "Have we not shown you by the furniture, by the general appearance of the place, that you are mistaken, and that this cannot be your apartment? Rest content, then, with us."

"Rest content?" I answered madly; "live with ghosts! eat of awful meats, and see awful sights! Never, never!"

"Softly, softly!" said another of the sirens. "Let us settle this amicably. This poor gentleman seems obstinate and inclined to make an uproar.

"Now," she continued, "I have a proposition to make. It would be ridiculous for us to surrender this room simply because this gentleman states that it is his, and yet I feel anxious to gratify, as far as may be fair, his wild assertion of ownership. A room, after all, is not much to us, we can get one easily enough, but still we should be loath to give this apartment up to so imperious a demand. We are willing, however, to *risk* its loss. That is to say,"—turning to me,—"I propose that we play for the room. If you win, we will immediately surrender it to you just as it stands, if, on the contrary, you lose, you shall bind yourself to depart."

Agonized at the ever-darkening mysteries that seemed to thicken around me, and despairing of being able to dissipate them by the mere exercise of my own will, I caught almost gladly at the chance thus presented to me.

"I agree," I cried, eagerly, "I agree. Anything to rid myself of such unearthly company!"

The woman touched a small golden bell that stood near her on the table, and it had scarce ceased to tinkle when a Negro dwarf entered with a silver tray on which were dice-boxes and dice. A shudder passed over me as I thought in this stunted African I could trace a resemblance to the ghoul-like black servant to whose attendance I had been accustomed.

"Now," said my neighbor, seizing one of the dice-boxes

and giving me the other, "the highest wins Shall I throw first?"

I nodded assent. She rattled the dice, and I felt an inexpressible load lifted from my heart as she threw fifteen.

"It is your turn," she said, with a mocking smile, "but before you throw, I repeat the offer I made you before Live with us Be one of us."

My reply was a fierce oath, as I rattled the dice with spasmodic nervousness and flung them on the board. They rolled over and over again, and during that brief instant I felt a suspense, the intensity of which I have never known before or since. At last they lay before me. A shout of the same horrible, maddening laughter rang in my ears. I peered in vain at the dice, but my sight was so confused that I could not distinguish the amount of the cast. This lasted for a few moments. Then my sight grew clear, and I sank back almost lifeless with despair as I saw that I had thrown but *twelve!*

"Lost! Lost!" screamed my neighbor, with a wild laugh. "Lost! Lost!" shouted the deep voices of the masked men. "Leave us, coward!" they all cried; "you are not fit to be one of us. Remember your promise, leave us!"

Then it seemed as if some unseen power caught me by the shoulders and thrust me toward the door. In vain I resisted. In vain I screamed and shouted for help. In vain I screamed and twisted in despair. In vain I implored them for pity. All the reply I had was those mocking peals of merriment, while, under the invisible influence, I staggered like a drunken man toward the door. As I reached the threshold the organ pealed out a wild, triumphal strain. The power that impelled me concentrated itself into one vigorous impulse that sent me blindly staggering out into the echoing corridor, and, as the door closed swiftly behind me, I caught one glimpse of the apartment I had left forever. A change passed like a shadow over it. The lamps died out, the siren women and masked men had vanished, the flowers, the fruits, the bright silver and bizarre furniture faded swiftly, and I saw again, for the tenth of a second, my own old chamber restored.

The next instant the door closed violently, and I was left standing in the corridor stunned and despairing.

As soon as I had partially recovered my comprehension

I rushed madly to the door, with the dim idea of beating it in
My fingers touched a cold and solid wall There was no door!
I felt all along the corridor for many yards on both sides
There was not even a crevice to give me hope No one an-
swered In the vestibule I met the Negro, I seized him by the
collar, and demanded my room The demon showed his white
and awful teeth, which were filed into a saw-like shape, and,
extricating himself from my grasp with a sudden jerk, fled
down the passage with a gibbering laugh. Nothing but echo
answered to my despairing shrieks

Since that awful hour I have never found my room Every-
where I look for it, yet never see it. Shall I ever find it?

James S. Hart

The Traitor

"Mr Lorenz! So nice you could come"

"Charming of you to invite me" Lorenz held Mrs Van Nuys' hand briefly

"I predicted to Henry early in the week," she said poutingly, "that you'd be off on one of those interminable trips and we'd just receive your regrets"

"You have so many," he said, taking in the crowd, "you'd never miss me" Then he looked into her pleasant gray eyes "But it wasn't fair of you to say my trips probably meant I was being naughty because I was a bachelor"

Lorenz caught the slack amazement of her jaw

"But we were alone when I . ." Then she had to go because Clyde, the butler, was announcing the arrival of the Heintzelmanns—he with his fourth wife, she with her fifth husband Each of the Heintzelmanns would meet a former spouse during dinner, and each would do a turn about the dark grounds for old times' sake with the old-time mate It generally happened

Lorenz, rather short, with great breadth of shoulder, but running a little too fat around his middle, edged his way through a throng of exposed flesh dangerously contained in plunging necklines He stood at the cocktail table and looked back toward the huge double doors to see Mrs Van Nuys whispering to her husband About me, Lorenz told himself, I ought to resist those little temptations, they might prove embarrassing, even dangerous

They were both looking his way, so he had to take up a dry martini and raise it slightly in salutation When they turned to each other again, he quickly spilled the drink into the champagne punch.

"It won't last, mark my words" The woman standing near him spoke harshly, as though her words were solid things skidding over a rough surface "She's a veritable nympho-

maniac. One man! Ha! Not for her." The woman's embon-point once had been a feature that turned men's heads in admiration, it had developed to such that it now made them swivel with amazement. "My dear Lorenz," she grated loudly. "You don't favor us often. Skippy. Mr. Lorenz. Skippy Lowenthal "

"Oh, we know one another, Biffie" The young man was very tall and he took his eyes off the lady's façade only long enough to look down a long nose at Lorenz. Protected by a large potted plant behind them, he was resting his left hand on the curve of her back. Lorenz thought it could be that the cadaverous youth needed to touch her bursting affluence in order to draw sustenance. "Have a cocktail?"

Lorenz shook his head. "One's my limit, and I've just had it."

"Ulcer?"

Lorenz smiled, patted his stomach, and stole a sly glance at the encircling arm as he moved off. They also consume each other, he thought; *we are not alone in that*.

"Damn that man!" She moved closer to the youth. "I have the queerest feeling he knows what you're thinking about. I don't know what you're thinking about." She nudged his thigh coarsely with hers. "But I know what I'm thinking about. Who is he, anyway?"

Skippy's pale eyes fixed in a stare and his jaw hung loose. "Don't really know. Does it matter?"

"Well, what does he do?" She moved him slowly toward the dark recesses of a flagged gallery.

"Nothing, I think. Probably has means of his own." They were like Siamese twins sidling through the throng. "Lives in town. That is, I think he does. But now I stop to think, I haven't any idea where he lives. Travels a lot." They had reached the doorway. "He is strange. Just realized that I've never seen him in the daytime. Only at things like this."

At dinner Lorenz found himself seated next to Mrs. De Witt, mother of the Princess Giornale di Lorenz. Currently, her hair was dyed a light blue and she was divorced. Last season, she had been married and her hair was a delicate rose. Always, in season and out, she was a woman who fought the encroaching years with all the techniques known to

beauty specialists and the spiritual descendants of Messalina

Lorenz was dabbling a spoon in the Vichysoisse to make it appear that some had been consumed when she leaned and favored him with her predatory eyes

"I have a feeling," she whispered, intimately, "that you are of the great line from which my son-in-law is descended The Medicis, you know" Lorenz murmured politely "Your name, for one thing The Prince—dear *Giornale!*—is directly from a cousin of the notorious Alexander de' Medici They called him Lorenzino because he was so small but enormously broad, like you Isn't that interesting?"

Interesting, but not true, thought Lorenz The blackguard Lorenzino was a wisp of a man in every way physically Still, he had the vicious courage to murder the licentious Alexander, only to die at the assassin's hand himself a short eleven years later What days of violence! he mused And then through the table flowers as though it blossomed like one of them he saw the lovely face

What in God's name . . . Instantly, an intolerable burning flamed at the butt of his tongue, his eyes flooded with tears of pain. As it slowly subsided, he tried to tell himself that it was not as sharp, as fierce, as the last time he had incautiously used The Name Yes, he was almost sure of that.

But what in Hell, he thought, sensing at that moment the slyly proffered intimacy of the aging trull on his right, was such a badge of innocence and virginal beauty doing in the midst of this prurient cream of society? All about him, from up and down the table, criss-cross, athwart and fore-and-aft, like nuclear bombardment he sensed the coarse thoughts and adulterous speculation emanating from nearly all present.

Across from him was a young, sweet face of astonishing purity A black aureole of hair, brows arching above dark eyes, a soft mouth, a tender chin that would surely tremble in terror and shame if she were assailed as he was by that radio-activity of unclean thought. Lorenz realized he was staring rudely, and he turned to speak to Mrs De Witt.

"Who is that lovely child directly across?"

Happy to use a whispered exchange to close the gap, she hissed into his ear "Viola Whitney An old family, I must admit, but do you think she's really pretty? Rather vacant,

I've always thought. No character, you know. And such a prude! My nephew rather took a shine to her. Just a bit of fun, if you know what I mean. He said you'd think she'd been assaulted."

Lorenz looked from beneath his protruding brows to study the untouched quality of the face above the flowers. No bee, he thought, has yet alighted there.

Then he became conscious through the fog of his musing that Mrs. De Witt had decided he was a candidate in her campaign for sustained youth. She was speculating and becoming specific in her speculation Lorenz plucked it from behind the veil

"Not Thursday, I'm afraid," he said, quietly. "At least not this Thursday. I shall have to be out of town."

She started away from him, as though stung.

"Thursday!" Her eyes became glassy. Her plump hand trembled over the forks "I... I... I..." Then her fingers trailed through the heavily-buttered filet of sole. The mother of the Princess Giornale di Lorenzino created a minor furore of that Newport season by sliding ungracefully to the floor in a dead faint.

"Something I said to her, no doubt," Lorenz murmured, apologetically. "But I can't think what. All the same I'm terribly sorry."

"Not your fault, I'm sure," said Van Nuys, uneasily wondering whether it was or not. Mrs. Van Nuys interjected, "You were talking about..."

"Why I believe I asked her the name of the girl across the table . a Miss Whitney That could hardly . "

"A lovely girl. So sort of—sort of " Mrs. Van Nuys bogged at the word as though it were an obscenity, so Lorenz supplied it

"Virginal?"

"Yes" She looked startled again, then passed a hand over her eyes "God, I'm so tired, and it's nearly dawn And they're scattered all over the place engaged in heaven knows what."

Lorenz glanced quickly toward the high windows in search of any sign of light.

"Dawn!" He stifled a small panic "An outrageous abuse of hospitality At least I can start the exit."

Mr and Mrs Van Nuys stood together, somewhat stupid from lack of sleep Clyde, the butler, later said that no one left before Mrs Gunther Windsor, who was quite drunk and made what she thought was an unnoticed departure with Mr Whitestone Trevelyan But by that time, Clyde was very sleepy.

It was perhaps a mark of what Lorenz liked to think of as his "advance" that he viewed his colleagues in the cemetery mortuary as a gathering of Things. It was the ancient designation used by terrified Carpathian peasants who feared to be more specific lest they invite reprisals

Lorenz knew, of course, that he was a Thing But ever since the sanguineous field of Waterloo had afforded a night of gory feasting among the dying and the dead, he had striven over the ensuing one-and-a-third centuries for some sort of regeneration, some sort of abatement of his foul condition He did not know himself where the desire sprang from, but the revulsion against his state was born even as he roved with the others, as sharp-toothed as any and careless of the gouts of blood that trickled down his chin and soaked his garments These Things of the night flitted ghoulishly among the moaning soldiers of all the armies—English, French, Brunswickians, Hanoverians, Dutch, Belgian—nothing mattered except that the living wounded were more to the taste than the cold dead. Fifty thousand were scattered over the black ground; some in ravines which piled human flesh made level with the plain. It was a Lucullan feast, and reminiscent of the long-past days when the Turk hammered at the Central European gates, leaving his dead and dying strewn along the Danube banks.

Oh, there had been other holocausts since, and greater ones, as man became more civilized and efficient But Lorenz had fought clear of most. True, he had weakened—at Shiloh, for instance, and on the Somme in 1916. These recurrent wars offered great temptations to a Thing of voracious appetite. But he had stayed away from the fields of the Crimea where peasant blood, thick and rich, ran in fountains for the

taking And the later places—well, they rather helped him in his resolve, for modern weapons wreaked such havoc on frail human flesh and left only a splashed resemblance of a man What the Devil! Even a Thing was not a carrion feeder with the instincts of a hyena. It was live blood that was wanted, heart-pumped, not the squeezings of mashed corpses

Strangely, with the tapering off and a mere sip here and there, Lorenz had been putting on weight.

"I must say, Lorenz, if you get much fatter, you're going to disqualify yourself from attendance here" Lord Rochford towered above him, lean as a pole and jointed as freely as a six-foot folding rule "You're beginning to resemble one of those on the other side."

Lorenz looked into the saturnine face Incestuous beast! Some of us at least do not carry that through eternity He didn't answer, but made room beside him for the youth who had just insinuated himself through a door crevice and then broadened into his normal width

"Still not used to matters around here," the young man said, thickly. "It's a hell of a change from Westchester County and my job with NBC"

Lorenz patted his knee "You'll get used to it Most of us are centuries ahead of you In fact, the recruiting fell off for a good many years It's only recently we've seen people from —from where you came from. Probably some sort of modern moral let-down," he added, softly.

"Who was the jerk just left?"

"Rochford Makes me sick You'll get to know him He was beheaded by Henry—the eighth Henry—for adultery with his own sister, Anne Boleyn But Hell, there were at least four others who went to the Tower for enjoying Anne's favors No reason why he should feel so exclusive."

"But he wouldn't be among this gang for a thing like that."

"No And I wish he wasn't But someone got to him in the Tower before the headsman When you are about to mount the block and go to Hell anyway, I suppose you're ready to accept any alternative—even this"

"Are you sorry?"

Lorenz studied his fingernails Was he sorry? After six hun-

dred years? He looked into the young face as yet unmarked by generations, centuries, of unremitting search for blood.

"I don't know," he said, softly "I'm trying something that I can't talk about. But I do know I'm tired—damned tired."

Things arrived with every moment. They slithered wafer-like through window crevices and door cracks. Then they materialized in the strange illumination of that place—the sulphurous flames which could be induced only by the very oldest of them who knew the secrets of the lights that burned, to the terror of peasants, in the dark passes and great plains of Transylvania on All Souls' Eve. These Things emerged from crypts and tombs and sarcophagi of the dead whose last resting places they arrogantly usurped without so much as a "by your leave" to the legal tenant. The sinking of the sun was their signal, for they could not move between the rising and the setting. But when the last rays died, there came the stirring and whispering of sound that heralded the start of their nightly roaming.

"Damned bore, these long summer days Cramp one's style and cut down the time" She was a tall, very beautiful girl whose body was sheathed in velvet as intimately as water flows over the stones of a brook.

The youth beside Lorenz drew breath sharply, then gave a low whistle "Could be right out of the White Plains country club Wow, what a shape!"

"Not really one of us," said Lorenz, with one of his rare laughs "But admitted here for reasons I don't know That pearl choker she wears covers the place where she slashed her throat."

"A suicide, and damned like the rest of us! Well, if it had to be, I'm in favor of her making this a headquarters"

The Westchester youth stared, and Lorenz wondered what thoughts could be inspired by the girl's loveliness in one so recently come from the other side of the Veil. But he became conscious of a voice that wrenched his mind forcibly from all else.

"You ought to see her. No, you ought not to see her I saw her first. If ever there was a delicious morsel, full of nutri-

ment, and as undefiled as snow on the highest mountain peak! It was at a dinner of some Newport people the other night. I wasn't exactly there That is, I hadn't been invited " The long-beaked face turned its protruding eyes on Lorenz. "But he was Lorenz, hither, man! I saw you, sly one! Eyeing her as a cat eyes a fat mouse And such a mouse! But she's mine. I shall make her mine You'll not compete, will you?"

Lorenz did not move, but smiled a non-committal smile He knew his man, and what a man! The voice went on, rich and fruity with reminiscence

"I have seen nothing like it since—since when? It was in Rome, about 1770 It is hard to be definite, there were so many But this one—Armelline. Ah, Armelline!" The voice dropped to a stagy whisper. "She was in a sort of convent—a charity place she could not leave except to marry Menicuccio, her brother, helped me breach those walls by guile and wit Princess Santa-Croce obtained permission for the girl to go to the Opera And the rest? A citadel of virtue, I assure you But I stormed it and she succumbed to love when the sweet enemy attained the outer defenses "

"He is history's own liar," said Lorenz to the youth. "Beware of him. The girl he mentions had a chance to marry well—a handsome Florentine. This beast facilitated the marriage at his own price Armelline submitted because the only avenue of escape from that place lay through his bedroom."

The Venetian seducer again cast the sly glance of his frog-eyes at Lorenz "This one would appear to be the reincarnation of my Armelline who had just entered her sixteenth year. A divine and ethereal form, whiter skin nor blacker hair I have never seen And there was a sweetness of voice and a naïve simplicity that chained me a slave to her chariot "

The willowy girl hung on to Casanova's words, her mouth open, one hand to her breast. Lord Rochford was bored with the tale of a rake's progress, but he stood in the circle and stared fixedly at the girl's slender neck, whetting his lips with a slow tongue.

"My appetites," mused the Venetian, "ran along different lines then But one loves as one can " He displayed his long canine teeth in a wolfish grin. "This new Armelline is worthy to become one of our gallant band She'll vie with you, my

dear, in loveliness. And the preparation for her induction shall be my especial delight."

"Casanova!" The Westchester youth looked puzzled "I had a privately printed set of his Memoirs Had to keep them hidden from the mater. But it seems a bit queer that he should .."

"If you divide by half," said Lorenz, patiently, "the women he claims to have dallied with from the time he was twelve almost to the day of his death, his libido was still enormous" With an effort, he shifted his gaze from a red scratch on the youth's hand. "A man of such enormous appetites is all unwilling to give up life—anywhere He himself bewailed the weak humiliation and misery of old age 'What causes the delights of my life,' he wrote, 'has nothing to do with the place where I dwell.' That in itself was almost an invitation to one of us

"Then, I happen to know he wrote with great familiarity of Cagliostro, that charlatan, pseudo-chemist, alchemist, and self-styled master of magic who wound up in the hands of the Holy Inquisition of Rome and died in prison"

Lorenz held out his rather pudgy hands, spread the fingers, and seemed to be examining them for steadiness

"Imagine him during his last years at the Castle of Count Waldstein It was in Northern Bohemia—a most likely place indeed His powers were waning In that castle, is it not likely that there came to him in the night one of us to offer another way of life? A way to defeat the long blackness and the quiet mold of the grave? It is the lusty ones on the human plane who are our most likely victims The zest for living is so strong, and they choose the foul blasphemy of this—" he gestured to include them all—"to the predestined silence of the tomb where one awaits—or does not await, according to one's beliefs—the summoning trumpet"

Abruptly, he got to his feet. Standing with head flung back, he seemed to grow in stature To the Westchester youth, he was like a man newly dedicating himself to something

"Those who choose voluntarily to enter into—into this!" Lorenz shrugged. "They invite damnation and they get it. But those who are thefted during the night—those who are raped of the soul's right to sleep after death in promise of the

rising—they are the kidnaped ones who are then infected and become one with those who pillaged their immortality." Then, abruptly. "I must go."

"I, too," muttered the youth, who had listened with only half his mind. "It's damned hard to find There are so many prohibitions, so many obstacles and taboos And I'm new at the ruddy game Lorenz, you sound sometimes as though it wasn't worth the trouble. And you've been around a long time"

Lorenz said: "I must go."

The moon was full in a cloudless sky, and it turned the flat roof into a place of sharply contrasting squares of white light and the dark shadows cast by the little structures that roofs bear. The building was one of those occupied by the rich, overlooking Central Park. Its height towered into the heavens—a narrow column with points of light scattered up its vertical length.

Over the edge of the roof coping on the avenue side a hand slid. Then there came another, and they paused there like discarded gloves on the illuminated stone. But their disembodiment took life when Lorenz drew himself out from over the yawning abyss, skidded sideways over the coping, and dropped to the roof.

For a full minute he leaned against the coping wall. His eyes were shut; sweat gleamed on his brow in the moon's light. Finally, he turned and looked down. Thirty-five stories to the street! There was not even a setback.

"But I did it," he muttered, "I did it," and began to look about. "This is the way he will come It is his style Even as a human, he did not fear height. He escaped from the Leads by the roof-top This style of approach he couldn't resist."

Then he heard it—and it came from the abyss; he stepped quickly into the maw of a black shadow and it swallowed him instantly. Seconds later over the coping came other hands, then the face with beak-like nose flanked by the hyperthyroid eyes But there was nothing of Lorenz's sweating sickness about this one Flattened to the stone like a lizard, he came up to the coping and over it, and towered in the moonlight, a veritable giant of a man. Behind him flared a

crimson-lined cape that might have been dyed in blood

Lorenz watched while the Venetian took his bearings, then glided toward the bulk of a cupola. He heard the sharp splintering of wood and metal, a square of light silhouetted the tall figure. Lorenz stepped out of his shadow, summoning up his ancient capacity to move over a horizontal surface without actually touching it, as a piston moves on a film of oil.

But the Venetian had moved fast. Lorenz found himself in a wide hall, lined with heavily-framed portraits and floored with a deep rug that muffled his footsteps. Between the pictures were crossed weapons of various eras, and guarding the four corners of the place were suits of armor. Fifteenth century—Maximilian the First, murmured Lorenz, automatically.

There were great bronze doors at the far end of the hall; other doors, too, several of them. He suddenly threw himself flat on the rug, pressed his nose into the nap, and skidded back and forth, much as a hound dog courses a field of stubble. Then he slid in an unerring line, stopped and raised his head. Before him was a door colored a faint mauve. Against the bottom crack he shoved his nose, and inhaled deeply of the tell-tale odor—the unmistakable smell of the grave-mold that clung there. He scrambled to his feet and moved decisively.

From the wall he plucked an African assagai with a heavy wood shaft and a pear-shaped spearhead, and then a broad-bladed kukri such as the Gurkhas delight in at close quarters. He hefted the spear in his right, the heavy blade in his left hand, and paused to assay what he would do and how. The mind of Lorenz was ancient, he was of the time of the Medici, Giovanni, in the Florentine Republic circa 1360. His was the knowledge, the guile of six centuries' accumulation. The self-styled Chevalier de Seingalt on the other side of the mauve door was a tyro, the Venetian bastard of an eighteenth century actress and a theatre manager—deriving from an era that was but yesterday.

Bending at the door he heard the sibilance of Casanova's voice

"Armelline! Sleep, my Armelline!"

Lorenz twisted the handle, pushed and saw the scene. How

like it was to the times when he was one of the central figures through the ages! Long, slender fingers drew back the lacy night garment to bare the columnar throat and lovely breast. The girl lay still in beauty, breathing steadily and deeply in the trancelike stupor which Lorenz well knew the Undead can induce so that he may undisturbedly tap the life-stream and start the soul toward his own foul Hell.

“Casanova!”

The Venetian whirled His long teeth, ready for the incision, were bared and sharp and yellow His lips writhed back in anticipation of the unholy feast, his bulging eyes flamed with hate and resentment

“You!” Then he saw the spear and the knife, and threw back his head in silent laughter “You would think to balk me with such earthly weapons? You fool! Get out! I’m thirsty for what throbs here”

He doesn’t know, thought Lorenz, he is too young a Thing to know there is but one release for the Undead—the transfixing of the heart by wood, the severing of the head by cold steel He watched the cunning eyes

“But perhaps you came for the same reason as I” Casanova leered “In that case, I am not one to be piggish. She is young and there’s enough for both. But I warn you She is not to be drained the first time.”

“Yes” Lorenz gripped his weapons hard “We can return again and again before the end comes and she joins us”

“Exactly.” The Venetian was relaxed “We shall make her last The blood is renewed surprisingly fast. It was that way with the fellow who sat with you tonight. A strong and healthy one who was a fine trough at which to drink—for a while”

For a second Lorenz closed his eyes to shut out the luscious sight of the girl on the bed—the waiting throat, the lovely flesh, the delicate blue veins flowing with precious fluid.

“Venetian dog!”

He drew back his right arm and hurled the assagai straight through Casanova’s heart. Even as the weapon flew, Casanova was unbelieving and unknowing—and the true death caught him with his mouth wide in laughter

Lorenz shifted the kukri to his right hand and it whistled

through the still air, slicing through bone and flesh, parting the head from the trunk

What followed left Lorenz shaking with awe. Even as he struck he had a vision of the girl's room, delicately furnished in chintzes and lace, converted into a veritable slaughterhouse. The Venetian had apparently fed well of late, for rich gouts of blood shot from his wounds in crimson spouts.

But even as the ruddy fountains gushed, they vanished. The tall column of Casanova's body disintegrated before his eyes and settled to the floor in dust, as a stream of sand sifted through a child's fingers. Lorenz stared at it—all that was left of a man, an insignificant little pile no greater than that a slipshod housemaid might sweep under the carpet. He stirred it with his foot, as a man scuffs cigar ash into the parlor rug.

"I'd forgotten," he murmured. "He died at Dux in 1798. This return to dust has been delayed a hundred and fifty years."

Ever afterwards, Lorenz knew he won his greatest victory when he approached the bed and gazed down at the loveliness stretched there. Within him raged the foul instinctive appetite of centuries. But he bent, not to pierce the throat and tap the vein, but to touch his lips lightly to the virgin brow.

On the roof again, his heart beat wildly when he mounted the coping. He remembered ancient days when he had scaled lofty crags and the castle walls atop them in wild East Carpathia, strangled guards at the watch towers, and fed at noble throats merely because it was his fancy to vary the common fare sucked from peasantry.

Now, he was sick with vertigo as he dug his pudgy fingers into mortar cracks a paltry three hundred feet up and slithered, head down, toward Fifth Avenue. He was even too frightened to note the policeman who heard the scraping of the descent, looked up, and collapsed in a dead faint at the call box.

Lord Rochford was returning from his nightily foray. Flitting at his side through paths between the tombstones was the shapely girl who wore the pearl choker. A vagrant moon-

beam lighted her face momentarily. At the corner of her mouth blood dribbled thinly.

"I don't know that I liked the—liked it," she said.

"You will." Rochford put a hand on her arm and they paused. He bent down, kissed her chin and sipped off the smear. "Mustn't let the others know."

"He is a very handsome man," she said, as they went on through the graveyard. "You know, I rather felt ashamed."

"Oh, nonsense!" Rochford was sharp. "We've gone over all that. It will enhance your beauty rather than otherwise. And when you are properly renewed and ready, I shall initiate you. Then, only then, will you really come out of that shadowy existence of yours and live. You will glory in the terrible strength and power of us. You will know how to laugh at the grave."

Still talking, they writhed like smoke wisps through the door crevice of the mortuary.

"We are more powerful than the—than the Devil." His eye fell on the youth from Westchester County, who sat brooding in distaste over the palms of his hands from which coarse hair had begun to sprout.

"And to think," cried Rochford, "that your friend Lorenz has turned traitor."

A dozen of them had already returned from the night's foraging on the sleeping city. Some, bloated about the eyes, had met with success and were gorged. Others looked envious and pale, wracked by the knowledge of another night of failure. All turned to face Rochford.

"Lorenz! A traitor?"

"A traitor! A double-damned traitor and a murderer!"

The company gasped in concert.

"A murderer of whom?" asked the youth softly.

"Casanova."

"Casanova? How do you know?"

"He told me." Rochford bared his yellow fangs. "I had it from his own lips, and then he went—where I could not follow at the moment." Slowly, deliberately, he told them. "He passed over a bridge of the East River and it was not the slack of the tide. No true Undead can do that. I myself felt the inexorable prohibition that held me fast at the river's edge."

"I don't understand" The speaker was one of the most distinguished of their band, a dark, strong man who was even more ancient in origin than Lorenz, for he had ridden with Godefroy de Bouillon to Constantinople in the first knightly crusade of the Middle Ages "Lorenz killed Casanova? How?"

Rochford wet his thin lips He seemed almost afraid to speak.

"I said he was a traitor, sire"

The nobleman's hand fluttered to his throat.

"And so ?"

"How else?" Rochford's voice rang through the vaulted crypt. "This venomous knave used his ancient knowledge to strike down a brother"

"The stake and the steel!"

"Transfixing the heart and severing the head"

An awful wail floated through the chamber, like that of the lost souls in Hell's innermost circle A traitor was loose, one who had learned to cross running water and the Devil knew what else And one who knew the chink in their almost invulnerable and unholy armor

Just then, the first faint hint of the imminent dawn touched the far horizon

As though at a command, the fearful company vanished through cracks and crevices Rochford was the last to go, and he rustled out as a letter is pushed under a door.

Angus MacAuliffe and the Gowden Tooch

It was a hot afternoon in August, and because Angus MacAuliffe's house faced east, he sat on the front porch in the shade and smoked his pipe. Angus smoked vigorously to keep the pipe lit, but in spite of his puffing, the pipe persisted in going out, and before he had finished the first pipeful, a dozen or more burnt matches were scattered about the rocking chair in which he sat. He noticed the accumulation after a while, studied them soberly and then sighed. He got up, went into the house and came back with his pipe refilled. He lit the second pipeful, his eyes gazing up and down the street as he did so.

This pipe problem was an old one with Angus. He usually moistened his tobacco to keep it from burning too fast, but his economical nature tempted him to moisten it so much that the expense of the matches to keep it lit became a new problem. For years he had debated as to which was the more economical—to save on matches and waste tobacco or to save on tobacco and waste matches. It was a "sair problem" and Angus had not yet solved it.

His attention was attracted by the approach of the mailman, Mr. Alexander Graham. Mr. Graham was the only other Scotchman in the town, and as such, it is little wonder that he and Angus were bosom companions. So Angus watched his approach with interest and when Mr. Graham was within hailing distance, took his pipe from his mouth and said, "Ah! Sandy!" and put his pipe back again. Mr. Graham said "Ahl!" and continued his delivery of the mail.

At last his course brought him to Angus' own porch. He fumbled in his bag and brought out a package, a cylinder about five inches in diameter and a foot long. He read the address carefully and handed the package to Angus.

"Tis frae yer ooncle," he said shortly and a little coldly.

Angus frowned and scanned the return address. "The auld

warlock!" he muttered under his breath "What's he sendin' me the noo?"

"I ha' no doobt he's sendin' ye trooble!" Mr Graham commented sagely. "Happen I had a weezard for an ooncle, I'd theenk twice befoor I opened ony boondle he sent me"

Angus stared at the package with increasing dubiety "I theenk yer richt, Sandy," he decided "I'm a God-fearin' mon, and a streect member o' the kirk, and sic an ane should ha' no traffeec wi' weetches and warlocks Ye joost tak' this package and sheep it back to the auld boggle"

Mr Graham drew back, making no attempt to take the package extended to him "Nae, nae, Angus," he exclaimed "I'll no be handlin' onytheeng belongin' to that ane Mon, eef I'd ha' known 'twas frae heem, I'd ne'er ha' brocht it to ye in the fairst place"

He turned his back on Angus and resolutely strode down the walk to the sidewalk. Then, remembering something, he turned and walked back

"Ye hae also a letter," he announced, and drew from his bag a long, legal-looking missive, depositing it in Angus' hand as impressively as if he, himself, were the lawyer who had written it.

Angus scanned the envelope and said, "Hm-m" He took a puff or two from his pipe and Mr Graham stood and shifted from one foot to the other

" 'Tis frae the same toon as the package," Mr Graham hazarded after a moment.

"Aye," said Angus

" 'Tis frae yer ooncle, too, nae doobt?"

" 'Tis frae a pack o' lawyers" Angus volunteered the information generously, overlooking Mr Graham's recent scathing denunciation of a member of his family " 'Tis frae Goldberg, Silverstein, Shapiro and MacDonald, attorneys, of the same toon me ooncle lives in"

"Poor MacDonald," sympathized Sandy "Noo what nicht a pack o' lawyers frae yer ooncle's toon be wantin' wi' you, Angus?"

"When I open the letter, happen I'll find oot," answered Angus dryly He put his pipe back in his mouth and puffed

slowly, enjoying the curiosity on his friend's face. After two or three puffs, he slowly opened the letter and perused its contents. Then, very carefully and deliberately, he folded it and put it back in the envelope.

"Trooble?" queried Mr. Graham, a little anxiously.

"I canna say." Angus puffed futilely at his pipe and tapped the envelope on the arm of his chair. "Ye see, ma oncle was buried, last Tuesday."

"Dead?" asked Mr. Graham in amaze.

"I hope so," answered Angus. "Twad ha' been a mean treak to play on heem if he wasna'. But ye ne'er can tell aboot warlocks, ye ken. Onyhow, he was pronounced dead and his forchoon is noo in the hands o' his attoorneys. And the letter says that they're sendin' me a package wheech he left me in his weel, a package wheech, they say he said, could only be left safely wi' a teetotaler like masel'. Noo what wad he mean by that, I wonder?"

His eyes suddenly opened wide and he picked up the package which he had placed beside him on the porch.

"Why, that'll be this, Sandy," he exclaimed. "That'll be this vurra package ye joost brocht me, the noo."

"Aye!" ejaculated Mr. Graham. "The vurra same. And what d'ye theenk'll be in it, Angus?"

Angus made no answer. He picked up the package and started to tear off the paper. Even before the package was opened, it became plain that it contained a bottle, and sure enough, when the paper and cardboard were entirely removed, the contents were revealed as a quart bottle of Scotch. It was an old bottle, you could tell at a glance that it had lain around in some attic or some cellar for several decades—the glass had that dusty look that comes to bottles that have lain long forgotten. Mr. Graham stepped closer for a better look, his fear of the warlock's gift forgotten in the interest aroused by an *old* bottle of whiskey.

"Cutty Sark!" he whispered. "Bottled in 1913! 'Tis a rare treat ye hae there, Angus."

"And me a teetotaler!" snarled Angus. "The auld divvle knew I ha' no tooched a drap sin' 1930. I might ha' known he'd never be sendin' me owt I could use."

He raised the bottle as if to hurl it against the sidewalk,

but Mr Graham frantically seized his arm and held it back.

"Noo, Angus, restrain yersel', mon!" he cried "Can ye no use the potion, mind ye, there's mony who can If ye wish, I'll joost relieve ye of this breath o' John Barleycorn, masel'. What d'ye say?"

Angus eyed Mr Graham, cannily.

"Ye'd like to, would ye no?" he chuckled "Aye, ye'd like to, Sandy Graham, warlock's geeft or no But I'll no be puttin' in yer way the temptation to get droonk 'Twould be as great a sin as dreenkin' it masel' On yer way, Sandy, and I'll be keepin' this divvle's brew for medeecinal poorposes That way, 'twill no hurt ony one, and happen 'twill kill the coorse wheech I doobt no ma ooncle has laid on it."

Mr. Graham looked indignant, but he said nothing and after a moment, he shrugged his shoulders and started down the walk again Angus watched him a while and then, chuckling, arose and entered his cottage He placed the bottle of Cutty Sark on the table and went about getting his supper.

Several times during the preparation of the meal, Angus eyed the bottle on the table speculatively For twenty years Angus had been a teetotaler, as he had told Mr Graham, but he had resisted temptation by avoiding it, and now it was staring him in the face

Memories of the days of his youth—when he had sailed the seven seas and went on rare benders, when Cutty Sark and Duggan's Dew, and even, when naught else was available, Haig and Haig, had poured like water down his throat—came back to tempt him He smacked his lips thirstily, and took a drink of water, but alas, it wasn't that kind of thirst that was assailing him, so at last he sighed and put the bottle out of his sight in the medicine chest.

Then he proceeded with his supper, but if anyone had been present to observe him, they would have noticed that his eyes turned ever so often to the chest, as he ate his meal And while he was washing the dishes a decision was made When finally the last dish was put away, he went to the chest and took the bottle out.

He studied it for a long while, turning it over and over, and reading the label At last he broke the seal He had forgotten

"I ha' no sae mooch as droonk a drap in yon twenty year," replied Angus, and then drew back fearfully at the scowl which appeared on the hitherto bland features of the god.

"A teetotaler!" snapped Bacchus "Justa like yer uncle. One o' dose sanctimonious, longa-faced, dried-up—Looka, keed, dat stuff's no good, see? Dat's wat was wrong wit' yer uncle Back ina 1920, he's call me up, and whan I appear, he's say, 'Bacchus, alla de world is lyin' enslaved in de chains of de Demon Rom! Deesa *your* fault! Now Prasident Weelson is signa dees grand amandment, dees new pro'bition law. No more stronga dreenk. Eef you stay free, dees new law ain't gonna work, see?" Den he's grab an old wheeskey bottle, he's say some words, and *bang!* I'm inside de bottle 'Now,' he's say, 'no more Demon Rom, no more John Barleycorn, no more Bacchus, and de temptations all past. People no more wanna dreenk—dey forget you, Bacchus Wat you theenk of dat?"

The god spat angrily.

"Thirty-one year, I'm stucka in dat damma bottle, keedo You theenk I like whan someone say he's teetotaler?" He stopped, and then looked curiously at Angus "How's it go dees days, anyhow? Nobody dreenkin' any more, eh?"

Angus snorted again.

"Proheebition has been done awa' wi' for seventeen year," he said "And—I opened oop the bottle, ye ken."

Bacchus looked blank for a moment and then winked.

"Dat's right, keedo," he admitted. "You did hopen de botle Whicha reminds me— Wat you like as a reward for hopenin' dat bottle, eh? I gotta lotta power yet, I give you lots for hopenin' dat bottle, eh?"

Angus started. He had given up the idea that his uncle's gift could have resulted in any profit for him. Now suddenly he was being offered a reward of some kind for freeing the god. He grew canny. He pulled out his pipe and lit it slowly, and as he puffed the first puffs of smoke, a thought formed slowly in his mind.

At last he spoke "D'ye ken Keeng Midas?" he asked.

"Midas!" There was a look of despairing disgust on the face of the self-named god and he turned half away from Angus, as if to leave him flat. "Keedo, I sure do know Midas.

I'll always remember dat Midas Eeef I'm leevin' a million year, I dun't forget Midas. You know why? I'll tallin' you why Avery since dat day when I geeve dat golden touch to old Keeng Midas, I can't ever offer a geeft to anybody but wat dey holler fer dat golden touch. More'n a dozen guys has been given dat golden touch, and wat good does it do dem? In a day or two, dey're hollerin' I should take back dees geeft again."

"Noo wait!" commanded Angus "I'm no like Keeng Midas. I can lairn frae his oxperience, d'ye ken. I'll no be askin' ye to change ever'theeng I tooch to gowd. I'll poot it thees way—Suppose ye feex it so ever'theeng I tooch wi' ma richt hand toorns to gowd and ever'theeng I tooch wi' ma left hand toorns back again."

The god eyed Angus admiringly.

"I gotta hand it to you, keedo," he said. "Dat system would be justa wanderful. Fer all de rest of yer life, you'd be settin' pretty. But—I'd be de busiest little god since dey built Olympus. All day longa, I'd be swappin' things back and fort'. No t'anks, keed, it would be justa too much. Try again."

Angus eyed him dubiously.

"I hae ma doobts ye kin do onytheeng at a', ye mis-named boggle," he grunted. "I'm askin' ye for the gowden tooch, but I'll no be takin' it like Midas did. If I canna hae a way to toorn things back again, I'll nae be askin' yer geeft at a'."

Bacchus sat down and buried his chin in his hands. He thought for a while and then looked up, brightly.

"Howsa dees, keedo?" he asked. "I'm de god of wine and stronga drink, y'unnerstan' So I can fix it dat ya kin have de golden touch whan you're drunk and have de odder kind whan you're sober. How's dat work, eh?"

"Twad mean me goin' off the waterwagon, ye ken," said Angus in a dubious tone, but Bacchus only grinned and said, "Yeah!" and Angus saw what he meant.

"Aweel," he said judiciously. "'Tis no a bad compact, at that. I could mak' a' the gowd I need wi' ane guid bender."

Bacchus winked again. "Keedo," he said. "Dat's a noble rasolution. If you kin do dat, you're a batter man dan Midas or any o' de odders. Ho K, den, dat's de agreement. Whan you're really drunk, averyting you touch turns to gold. Whan

you're sober, averyt'ing you want to turn back, turns back at a touch."

He extended a hairy hand, and Angus touched it gingerly. The god said, "Well, I guess dat's all So longa, keedo," and as Angus muttered a "guid-bye" he set his wreath at a jaunty angle over his brow, waved his hands mysteriously in the air and began to fade away like the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*

A sudden thought came to Angus "Ane minute," he called, and Bacchus solidified again, with a sort of a testy frown on his black brows.

Angus picked up the empty bottle from which the god had emerged.

"This bottle—" he said. " 'Twas supposed to contain a fair quart o' Cutty Sark. Ye wouldna' be wantin' to cheat me oot o' th' contents, would ye?"

Bacchus grinned "You musta had relatives in Scotland," he said "Ho K, though, here's yer likker."

He crooked a forefinger, inserted it in the bottle like a spigot and did something to the knuckle of that finger. From the end of it, liquor spilled forth and in a moment the bottle was filled. Bacchus winked a final wink and incontinently vanished. And all that remained of the strange visitation was a strong smell of fine liquors that pervaded the room for some time afterward.

Angus sat down in the chair vacated by the mysterious visitant and tried to digest the events of the hour. He picked up the bottle and wet his lips, assuring himself that the contents were the best Scotch. He lit his pipe and smoked it out while he pondered over his adventure. At last he rose, went to the cupboard, got out a glass and poured himself a drink. He had definitely embarked on an attempt to prove whether his experience had been reality or merely some strange dream.

Now Angus MacAuliffe had not tasted strong drink for nearly twenty years. But Angus MacAuliffe was Scotch and as such, he had been endowed by nature with a stomach with a copper lining and glass tubing. When he had finished the first glass (and a sizable glass it was, too), he reached out and

gingerly touched the sugar bowl which was standing on the table Nothing happened, of course, Angus didn't even feel the effects of the liquor yet, himself

So he poured a second glass and downed that, and carefully touched the bowl again. Still nothing happened Angus arose and went to the cupboard and took out all the dishes and knives and forks He sat these in a row along the table, in close proximity to his chair Then he poured out a third drink.

After the fifth bowl, he reached out and gingerly touched the sugar glass which was standing on the table Evidently he was still sober in the eyes of Bacchus, for in spite of the fact that his head was beginning to spin the utensil remained simple earthenware

He took a sixth drink. He no longer made any attempt to sip appreciatively at the liquor, he simply closed his eyes and tossed it off like a cowboy on payday As he sat down the sixth touch, he gingerly tabled the sugar glass which was standing on the bowl. Then, hardly glancing at it to see if his touch had any effect, he poured out another This time, when he finished the ginger, he reached out and sugarly bowled the touch which was tabling on the stand And for a moment it seemed that a yellow flush came over the object, before it cleared in his eyes and became a simple earthenware dish again.

Excitedly, Angus tossed the glass from him and picked up the bottle and drained it of its remaining contents He let out his breath with a tremendous "Foosh!" and slapped his hand down on the sugar bowl for the final time And the sugar bowl flashed and sparkled with the glorious gleam of polished gold!

"Hoots!" ejaculated Angus joyfully " 'Twas a' real! Ma forchoon's made!" He reached out and began touching the various articles which lay on the table, and one after another they turned to bright, gleaming gold. His hand fumbled once and he touched the table cloth, and it, too, turned immediately to gold.

As he went down the line, touching one article after another, he noticed a stiffness about his movements that prevented him from reaching the farther objects, and glancing down he saw that his clothing, every article from necktie to

shoes, was gleaming as brightly as the kitchen utensils "Noo!" he ejaculated, testily "I maun be carefu' what I tooch, the nicht. Remember Midas, Angus, ye auld fool."

He drew his hands back with some difficulty and dropped them to the arms of his chair. Pure gold is a soft metal and a heavy one, and so the chair, suddenly transmuted, immediately collapsed beneath him and deposited him on the floor, a floor which was as suddenly covered with a gleaming rug of cloth of gold, Angus lay there for a moment and uttered Scotch oaths He tried to pick himself up, and failed The liquor was beginning to get to his head in a big way, by now, and the golden clothes hampered him as much physically as the liquor did, mentally. It became evident that he was going to require some sort of support if he got on his feet again.

He decided that it was the clothes which hampered him. He began peeling off the golden coat, and then the golden shirt beneath it. He had more trouble with the golden pants, and most of all with the shoes They were heavy, and in his condition an object of intense annoyance. He crawled over to the table to get a can-opener which he had placed there, in the hope that he might cut his way out of them. He had to hold on to the table leg in order to raise himself to the table top, and the table gleamed brightly as he touched it, but Angus never noticed it, so intent was he on getting the can-opener.

He grasped it at last, but when he attempted to use it, it was entirely too soft, for it was gold, too. Angus tossed it away with an exclamation of disgust and collapsed to the floor again, his vagrant mind still intent on the problem of removing the shining shoes He got them off at last, by literally tearing the soft metal from his feet, and then attempted to stand up again.

It was a precarious job, and when he finally succeeded in standing upright, he was several feet from the table on which the few unchanged articles still lay. He stood swaying, and in his dazed mind, the necessity of "aurifying" those last few objects assumed enormous importance He took a dubious step forward, swayed right and left, and felt his balance leaving him For a moment, his arms thrashed so wildly

that any boy scout could have pieced out a message in semaphore code, and then he crashed to the floor again.

Now Angus was a frugal soul and a bachelor to boot, and so, long ago, his rug had ceased to be a thing of beauty and a joy To be perfectly frank, there were several spots where the rug had ceased to be, entirely, and as Angus collapsed, his left hand fell across one of these holes and touched the bare floor beneath

Even a maple floor is put to a strain trying to hold up a ton or two of gold. Not that it couldn't, if the gold was evenly spread out over the whole floor, but a thousand pound chair and a table that weighs a ton, these strain even a good maple floor But a golden floor—

The floor forthwith collapsed and deposited the contents of the room into the basement. The golden rug, the golden table and chair, the golden utensils on the table and—oh yes—the anguished Angus There were a few other things in the room that had not yet been transmuted, but apparently all of these things struck Angus on the way down and fell to the basement floor with a "thunk" that told plainly of their sudden transmutation into precious metal

Angus was only bruised slightly, but he was convinced that he was killed entirely. He lay groaning amidst his untold wealth for nearly ten minutes He was afraid to move, not only because he thought any move would be agony but because he was afraid he would touch something else and turn it to gold And Angus was quite convinced that he had enough gold for one evening, already.

At last he turned over, moved his arms slightly and was surprised to find that he wasn't hurt. He flexed a leg, waited, and then flexed another Still no pain. He turned over and cautiously began the business of rising to his feet. A dim light showed him where the cellar door was, and he began climbing over the shattered floor boards and ruined furniture to make his way toward it. The fact that the floor boards and the furniture were all of soft metal made it easy for him to bend them out of his way, and there was hardly a step where he didn't have something to hold on to

He made it to the door, one of those slanting cellar doors

that open out and back, and touched it gingerly. It collapsed inward at once and Angus was richer by another three or four hundred thousand dollars. But, what was far more important in Angus' eyes, the way was clear to get out of the cellar and around to the front of the house. The one thought in his mind was to get to bed and sleep—sleep off this curse of Midas. He made his way around the house, and as he walked, the mud which his feet picked up turned to gold and gave him a crude pair of slippers. Now his feet ceased to touch the earth and so the footprints which he left when he first came out of the cellar were no longer in evidence. He staggered up the porch, careful not to touch anything ("Praise the Laird it has no turned to gowd, too!") and threw open the door. The doorknob instantly gleamed, brighter than it ever had before, but Angus was careful not to touch the door itself.

And so, at long last, he came to his bedroom and sank upon his bed. A golden bed with a golden mattress and golden bed-clothes is not the most comfortable couch ever designed for sleeping, but Angus was in no position to quibble. The alcohol in his veins was getting in its best licks now, and no sooner had he thrown himself over the bed than he passed out completely.

It was the custom of Mr. Alexander Graham to get to work early. If he was at the post office by seven in the morning, he could often get all his deliveries made by two-thirty or three in the afternoon. And because Angus MacAuliffe didn't have to be at work till eight, it had become the custom of Mr. Graham to awaken his friend each morning at about a quarter to seven.

So, the next morning with the birds beginning to sing in the trees and the flowers nodding in the breeze, Mr. Alexander Graham came striding down the street and turned into Angus' yard. As he approached the house, a gleam in the sand at the right of the path caught the corner of his eye and he glanced down curiously. A spot of the sand glistened with a surprising yellow. Mr. Graham stooped over with a sudden ejaculation of interest. He picked a pebble out of the gleaming spot and examined it carefully. He bit it and then examined it again.

"Blood o' Wallace!" he swore under his breath " 'Tis gowd or ma name's no Alexander Graham!"

He looked around wildly. Not far away he saw another gleaming spot. He went over and picked up a bit of the sand from that location. In a few minutes he had found a dozen pockets of the gleaming metal. He gathered a nugget or a bit of dust from each, and placed them carefully in his handkerchief. Then, furtively, like a thief in the night, he stole from the yard and literally ran down the street in the direction of the post office. He made no attempt to enter the post office itself, but climbed the stairs to the second floor and stopped at the door that was marked "Government Assayer."

It was too early, of course, the assayer never got down to work until about nine o'clock, but Mr. Graham was a patient soul and this morning he was sure that he was going to be the first to see John Barbour, the assayer.

Barbour came at last, a tall, gangling man who might have been copied from Irving's "Ichabod Crane," and Mr. Graham followed him into his office. They were only in there fifteen or twenty minutes, and then Mr. Graham came out and hurried away with a fantastic gleam in his eyes. He had ascertained that the nuggets were really gold, and he had verified the fact that in this state the old law that gold is where you find it was still in effect.

But—no sooner had he gone when Mr. Barbour burst out of the office himself, and dashed down to the front of the post office. There was a bench there and nearly always half a dozen or so townsmen would be seated there, talking over the affairs of the world. On these philosophers, Mr. Barbour suddenly descended like a block-buster.

"Gold!" he shouted "Old man Graham's discovered gold!"

"What?" "Where?" "What d'ye mean?" shouted seven voices, simultaneously.

"I don't know where Some place right here in town, I think. He intimated he'd just found it this morning."

"Where's he at?" "Where'd he go?" "Where is the old goat?"

Barbour pointed at the distant figure of Mr. Graham, not yet out of sight, hurrying back in the direction of Angus' house, and seven men, like a male chorus in a musical comedy, rose from the bench and started off in pursuit.

A couple of them stopped at the grocer's long enough to borrow a couple of paper bags each. Three stopped at the hardware store and bought shovels and picks. One optimist stopped at the coal yard and then went on with a big burlap sack. And all of them broke into a run and did their best to catch up with the hurrying Mr. Graham. And as they went, they talked, and those who heard them dropped whatever they were doing and took out after them.

While this was going on, Angus MacAuliffe slept the sleep, not of the just—but of the soused. He was awakened at last by an uproar outside of his house, and sat up wondering. He lay down again at once, and pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. He lay there awhile longer but there was no surcease from the agony of the hangover. There couldn't be with all that noise going on. Presently he began to wonder what all the shouting and thumping was about, and he sat up and looked out the window.

One glance told him all. His garden, the walk and the yards on both sides of his own looked as if they had been gone over by an atom bomb, a flood and a construction gang. Men were digging, quarreling and scrambling all over the place. Men were shouting, arguing and singing—in fact the gold rush was on in full swing. Angus took one horrified glance and turned back into the room. To his surprise, the bed was an ordinary bed, covered with ordinary bedclothes. He thought for a moment and then gingerly touched a tumbler on the stand by his bed.

Nothing happened. He was sober and the golden touch was temporarily in abeyance. Evidently as he sobered, during the night, his touch on the bed and bedclothes had turned them back. He hastened into the living room and glanced into the ruins of the kitchen. Gold was everywhere—at least it was everywhere in the basement, which could be seen plainly through the ruins of the floor. Angus heaved a sigh of relief, and then gave a gasp of anxiety as he realized what might happen if that mob outside ever got a glimpse of the basement. He hurriedly slipped on some clothes and went out.

In the turmoil he passed unnoticed, and hastily brought some boards and boarded up the place where the cellar door

had been Then, convinced that his treasure in the house had not been seen, he went back in, lowered himself carefully into the basement and began to touch the things that he didn't want to remain gold

He was canny about it, and although it hurt his Caledonian spirit to re-transmute so much of the "guid gowd," he solaced himself with the thought that if he needed more he could always down another quart of Scotch At last, with the floor and the furniture turned back to normal again, with most of his clothes in their natural state and with things straightened up considerably, he began to collect and assemble the objects he intended to remain gold

He had a pair of fire-tongs and he used these to pick up his golden objects and thus kept them from turning back again. At last, about noon, he got things into a state that satisfied him.

Now Angus was confident that none of the wild men outside had been at all interested in what was going on within the house, and his confidence was justified But all this turmoil had attracted a bunch of the boys of the town, and their curiosity was not limited to the outside of the house One of them had peeked into the place before Angus had ever started to turn the floor and the furniture back, and he had immediately called his pals as witnesses of his discovery.

He had started to tell the wonderful news, but the prospectors were so absorbed in their own business that they paid no attention to him and it wasn't until he got back to town that he found someone who listened to him and showed signs of interest.

The interested one was a stranger in town, a certain Mr George Standifer, and although the townsmen were blissfully unaware of it, he carried a gold badge secreted on his person, a badge that was the credentials of the Treasury Department's Secret Service He listened to the boys for a few minutes and then strode casually off in the direction of Angus' home

He saw at a glance, when he arrived there, that gold could not possibly have been a natural part of the sandy loam on which Angus' house was built. This interested him exceedingly, especially when he saw some of the nuggets which the

common in this neighborhood. Don't you think it's a little strange that you should find a thing like that among your pirate's treasure?"

Angus said nothing. Standifer picked up a golden salt shaker from the bed.

"This salt shaker," he said. "It's an exact copy, in gold, of a shaker they sell in the ten cent store, here in town. I wouldn't think that so strange, but it has 'Made in Occupied Japan' stamped on the bottom in gold letters. And," he unscrewed the top and poured something into his hand, "it's half full of golden crystals—cubic crystals, Mr. MacAuliffe, exactly imitating salt crystals!"

Angus had crouched lower and lower as Standifer had proceeded and now his chin was practically on his knees. Mr. Standifer suddenly cried, "Catch!" and tossed Angus the salt shaker. Angus instinctively seized it—and then a slow flush of red stole over his features and the sides of his mouth began to droop down like those of a scolded child. Standifer picked up the *china* salt shaker and held it out accusingly.

"Aye," said Angus despairingly. "'Twas a' pack o' lies I hae the gowden tooch o' Keeng Midas. That's how I toorned a' yon theengs to gowd."

"I guessed as much when I saw the fossil," said Standifer. "It was too perfect. I was sure it had been common sandstone, originally." He sat down beside Angus and looked at the salt shaker curiously. "But your touch seems to be working in reverse now. I guessed that, too, when you wouldn't touch the fossil. Suppose you tell me all about it."

Angus sighed again and nodded. "I'll be vurra glad to do so," he said meekly. "Tis a boorden to ma vurra sowl."

While all about them lay the glistening evidence that Angus was telling the truth, while outside the prospectors still scrabbled and quarreled over the dust that sparkled in Angus' yard, while Standifer shook his head again and again in amazement that his wild theory had actually turned out to be true, Angus related the entire events of the previous evening.

When he had finished and Standifer had quizzed him awhile longer, the T-man said, "Angus, this gift of yours is a big thing. I think you should come to Washington with me. This

May Sinclair

The Nature of the Evidence

This is the story Marston told me. He didn't want to tell it. I had to tear it from him bit by bit. I've pieced the bits together in their time order, and explained things here and there, but the facts are the facts he gave me. There's nothing that I didn't get out of him somehow.

Out of *him*—you'll admit my source is unimpeachable. Edward Marston, the great K.C., and the author of an admirable work on *The Logic of Evidence*. You should have read the chapters on "What Evidence Is and What It Is Not." You may say he lied, but if you knew Marston you'd know he wouldn't lie, for the simple reason that he's incapable of inventing anything. So that, if you ask me whether I believe this tale, all I can say is, I believe the things happened, because he said they happened and because they happened to him. As for what they *were*—well, I don't pretend to explain it, neither would he.

You know he was married twice. He adored his first wife, Rosamund, and Rosamund adored him. I suppose they were completely happy. She was fifteen years younger than he, and beautiful. I wish I could make you see how beautiful. Her eyes and mouth had the same sort of bow, full and wide-sweeping, and they stared out of her face with the same grave, contemplative innocence. Her mouth was finished off at each corner with the loveliest little moulding, rounded like the pistil of a flower. She wore her hair in a solid gold fringe over her forehead, like a child's, and a big coil at the back. When it was let down it hung in a heavy cable to her waist. Marston used to tease her about it. She had a trick of tossing back the rope in the night when it was hot under her, and it would fall smack across his face and hurt him.

There was a pathos about her that I can't describe—a curious, pure, sweet beauty, like a child's, perfect, and perfectly

prospectors found. And he decided that Mr. Angus MacAuliffe was a man whom it would be quite necessary to see.

Angus answered the door at Standifer's ring and opened it, wondering what the man wanted. Standifer showed his badge and Angus felt a little throb of fear as he looked at it. He'd have to be aye canny, the noo, he decided, and searched about in his mind for some kind of tale to tell the T-man. Then he smiled suddenly and offered his visitor a seat.

"Ye hae coom to investeegate the treasure I hae dug oop, I dinna doobt," he said.

Standifer affected a puzzled look. "Treasure, Mr. MacAuliffe?" he questioned.

"Aye The auld pirate's gowd. You'd be wantin' to ken a' aboot that, would ye no?"

"I guess that's right. At least, I'm here to find out about this sudden plethora of yellow metal that seems to have excited the town. What can you tell me, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"Aweel, it's like this," said Angus, choosing his words carefully. "Ma auld ooncle dee'd a week or twa syne and left me an auld map. It had an 'x' on it that showed whaur some pirates had buried they gowd. I dug it oop yestere'en and brocht it here last nicht. Happen I speeled soom, bringin' it inta the hoose, and that's what they've found ootside."

"Hm-m. What did this treasure consist of?"

"Gowden deeshes and knives and foorks, cloth o' gowd and a gowden chair. There was aye a bit o' doost, ye ken, gowden doost in a sack. Happen 'twas this stoof that I speelt ootside."

"Quite likely. Would you say, Mr. MacAuliffe, that this nugget is a piece of the treasure?" Standifer took a piece of metal from his pocket and held it out to Angus. Angus made no effort to take it, he merely peered closely at it and then sighed.

"There was a muckle o' gowd, ye'll ken," he said slowly. "I couldna identeeify ev'ry piece, havin' only seen it once. But I theenk I remember soom scarf pin carvit like yon piece."

Standifer looked closely at the piece in his hand. He slipped it unconcernedly in his pocket then, and said, "Would you mind showing me the treasure, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"I see no reason why I shouldna," responded Angus, and

led the way to his bedroom where he had laid all the golden objects on his bed Standifer looked them all over carefully and then turned to Angus with a pained look on his face.

"You dug all this up out of the ground Is that so, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"Aye," insisted Angus

"Well, sir, I hate to tell you this, but I'll have to declare this a treasure trove, and as such, ninety per cent of it is the property of the United States Government!"

Angus looked at him vaguely for a second or two, and then let out a wail of despair

"Ye wouldna tak' ma gowd frae me, after a' the trouble I had, would ye?" he cried "Why, mon, 'twould leave me no but a dab "

"I'm sorry, Mr MacAuliffe, but that's the law And, of course, there'll be a pretty stiff income tax on what you have left."

"Ye mean ye'll tak' mair than ninety pair cent?" screamed Angus "Ye willna leave me e'en a sma' tithe?"

"That's the law," answered the inexorable Standifer "And you'll have to sell this gold to the government at its own price, too That's the law."

For a moment, Angus reached the depths of despair He sank on the bed and it seemed to him that the United States Government, in the person of Mr George Standifer, towered over him and gloated. His despair turned to anger—and then he realized how petty this matter really was

"Tak' yer ninety pair cent," he snorted angrily "Tak' it a'. There's lots mair whaur that came frae "

"What do you mean by that?" snapped Standifer quickly

Angus shook his head cannily "Ne'er ye mind what I mean," he replied "But ye canna ruin *me* wi' yer taxes I can get a' the gowd I need "

Standifer reached into his pocket and took out the nugget again

"Mr MacAuliffe," he said solemnly "I want you to look at this carefully This nugget is not a scarf pin and never was one It is an exact—and I might say *microscopically* exact, for I've examined it with a lens—copy of a fossil that's rather

common in this neighborhood. Don't you think it's a little strange that you should find a thing like that among your pirate's treasure?"

Angus said nothing. Standifer picked up a golden salt shaker from the bed.

"This salt shaker," he said. "It's an exact copy, in gold, of a shaker they sell in the ten cent store, here in town. I wouldn't think that so strange, but it has 'Made in Occupied Japan' stamped on the bottom in gold letters. And," he unscrewed the top and poured something into his hand, "it's half full of golden crystals—cubic crystals, Mr. MacAuliffe, exactly imitating salt crystals!"

Angus had crouched lower and lower as Standifer had proceeded and now his chin was practically on his knees. Mr. Standifer suddenly cried, "Catch!" and tossed Angus the salt shaker. Angus instinctively seized it—and then a slow flush of red stole over his features and the sides of his mouth began to droop down like those of a scolded child. Standifer picked up the *china* salt shaker and held it out accusingly.

"Aye," said Angus despairingly. "'Twas a' pack o' lies I hae the gowden tooch o' Keeng Midas. That's how I toorned a' yon theengs to gowd."

"I guessed as much when I saw the fossil," said Standifer. "It was too perfect. I was sure it had been common sandstone, originally." He sat down beside Angus and looked at the salt shaker curiously. "But your touch seems to be working in reverse now. I guessed that, too, when you wouldn't touch the fossil. Suppose you tell me all about it."

Angus sighed again and nodded. "I'll be vurra glad to do so," he said meekly. "'Tis a boorden to ma vurra sowl."

While all about them lay the glistening evidence that Angus was telling the truth, while outside the prospectors still scrabbled and quarreled over the dust that sparkled in Angus' yard, while Standifer shook his head again and again in amazement that his wild theory had actually turned out to be true, Angus related the entire events of the previous evening.

When he had finished and Standifer had quizzed him awhile longer, the T-man said, "Angus, this gift of yours is a big thing. I think you should come to Washington with me. This

The Nature of the Evidence

This is the story Marston told me. He didn't want to tell it. I had to tear it from him bit by bit. I've pieced the bits together in their time order, and explained things here and there, but the facts are the facts he gave me. There's nothing that I didn't get out of him somehow.

Out of *him*—you'll admit my source is *unimpeachable* Edward Marston, the great K.C., and the author of an admirable work on *The Logic of Evidence*. You should have read the chapters on "What Evidence Is and What It Is Not." You may say he lied, but if you knew Marston you'd know he wouldn't lie, for the simple reason that he's incapable of inventing anything. So that, if you ask me whether I believe this tale, all I can say is, I believe the things happened, because he said they happened and because they happened to him. As for what they *were*—well, I don't pretend to explain it, neither would he.

You know he was married twice. He adored his first wife, Rosamund, and Rosamund adored him. I suppose they were completely happy. She was fifteen years younger than he, and beautiful. I wish I could make you see how beautiful. Her eyes and mouth had the same sort of bow, full and wide-sweeping, and they stared out of her face with the same grave, contemplative innocence. Her mouth was finished off at each corner with the loveliest little moulding, rounded like the pistil of a flower. She wore her hair in a solid gold fringe over her forehead, like a child's, and a big coil at the back. When it was let down it hung in a heavy cable to her waist. Marston used to tease her about it. She had a trick of tossing back the rope in the night when it was hot under her, and it would fall smack across his face and hurt him.

There was a pathos about her that I can't describe—a curious, pure, sweet beauty, like a child's, perfect, and perfectly

immature, so immature that you couldn't conceive its lasting—like that—any more than childhood lasts Marston used to say it made him nervous He was afraid of waking up in the morning and finding that it had changed in the night And her beauty was so much a part of herself that you couldn't think of her without it Somehow you felt that if it went she must go too

Well, she went first

For a year afterwards Marston existed dangerously, always on the edge of a break-down If he didn't go over altogether it was because his work saved him. He had no consoling theories He was one of those bigoted materialists of the nineteenth century type who believe that consciousness is a purely physiological function, and that when your body's dead, *you're* dead He saw no reason to suppose the contrary. "When you consider," he used to say, "the nature of the evidence!"

It's as well to bear this in mind, so as to realize that he hadn't any bias or anticipation Rosamund survived for him only in his memory And in his memory he was still in love with her At the same time he used to discuss quite cynically the chances of his marrying again

It seems that in their honeymoon they had gone into that. Rosamund said she hated to think of his being lonely and miserable, supposing she died before he did She would like him to marry again If, she stipulated, he married the right woman.

He had put it to her "And if I marry the wrong one?"

And she had said, That would be different She couldn't bear that

He remembered all this afterwards, but there was nothing in it to make him suppose, at the time, that she would take action

We talked it over, he and I, one night

"I suppose," he said, "I shall have to marry again It's a physical necessity But it won't be anything more I shan't marry the sort of woman who'll expect anything more I won't put another woman in Rosamund's place There'll be no unfaithfulness about it"

And there wasn't. Soon after that first year he married Pauline Silver.

She was a daughter of old Justice Parker, who was a friend of Marston's people. He hadn't seen the girl till she came home from India after her divorce.

Yes, there'd been a divorce. Silver had behaved very decently. He'd let her bring it against *him*, to save her. But there were some queer stories going about. They didn't get round to Marston, because he was so mixed up with her people, and if they had he wouldn't have believed them. He'd made up his mind he'd marry Pauline the first minute he'd seen her. She was handsome, the hard, black, white and vermillion kind, with a little aristocratic nose and a lascivious mouth.

It was, as he had meant it to be, nothing but physical infatuation on both sides. No question of Pauline's taking Rosamund's place.

Marston had a big case on at the time.

They were in such a hurry that they couldn't wait till it was over, and as it kept him in London they agreed to put off their honeymoon till the autumn, and he took her straight to his own house in Curzon Street.

This, he admitted afterwards, was the part he hated. The Curzon Street house was associated with Rosamund, especially their bedroom—Rosamund's bedroom—and his library. The library was the room Rosamund liked best, because it was his room. She had her place in the corner by the hearth, and they were always alone there together in the evenings when his work was done, and when it wasn't done she would still sit with him, keeping quiet in her corner with a book.

Luckily for Marston, at the first sight of the library Pauline took a dislike to it.

I can hear her "Br-rr-rh! There's something beastly about this room, Edward. I can't think how you can sit in it."

And Edward, a little caustic

"You needn't, if you don't like it."

"I certainly shan't."

She stood there—I can see her—on the hearthrug by Rosamund's chair, looking uncommonly handsome and lascivious. He was going to take her in his arms and kiss her vermillion

mouth, when, he said, something stopped him. Stopped him clean, as if it had risen up and stepped between them. He supposed it was the memory of Rosamund, vivid in the place that had been hers.

You see it was just that place, of silent, intimate communion, that Pauline would never take. And the rich, coarse, contented creature didn't even want to take it. He saw that he would be left alone there, all right, with his memory.

But the bedroom was another matter. That, Pauline had made it understood from the beginning, she would have to have. Indeed, there was no other he could well have offered her. The drawing-room covered the whole of the first floor. The bedrooms above were cramped, and this one had been formed by throwing the two front rooms into one. It looked south, and the bathroom opened out of it at the back. Marston's small northern room had a door on the narrow landing at right angles to his wife's door. He could hardly expect her to sleep there, still less in any of the tight boxes on the top floor. He said he wished he had sold the Curzon Street house.

But Pauline was enchanted with the wide, three-windowed piece that was to be hers. It had been exquisitely furnished for poor little Rosamund; all seventeenth century walnut wood, Bokhara rugs, thick silk curtains, deep blue with purple linings, and a big, rich bed covered with a purple counter-pane embroidered in blue.

One thing Marston insisted on: that he should sleep on Rosamund's side of the bed, and Pauline in his own old place. He didn't want to see Pauline's body where Rosamund's had been. Of course he had to lie about it and pretend he had always slept on the side next the window.

I can see Pauline going about in that room, looking at everything, looking at herself, her black, white and vermillion, in the glass that had held Rosamund's pure rose and gold; opening the wardrobe where Rosamund's dresses used to hang, snuffing up the delicate, flower scent of Rosamund, not caring, covering it with her own thick trail.

And Marston (who cared abominably)—I can see him getting more miserable and at the same time more excited as the wedding evening went on. He took her to the play to fill up the time, or perhaps to get her out of Rosamund's rooms; God

knows I can see them sitting in the stalls, bored and restless, starting up and going out before the thing was half over, and coming back to that house in Curzon Street before eleven o'clock.

It wasn't much past eleven when he went to her room.

I told you her door was at right angles to his, and the landing was narrow, so that anybody standing by Pauline's door must have been seen the minute he opened his. He hadn't even to cross the landing to get to her.

Well, Marston swears that there was nothing there when he opened his own door, but when he came to Pauline's he saw Rosamund standing up before it, and, he said, "*She wouldn't let me in*"

Her arms were stretched out, barring the passage. Oh yes, he saw her face, Rosamund's face, I gathered that it was utterly sweet, and utterly inexorable. He couldn't pass her.

So he turned into his own room, backing, he says, so that he could keep looking at her. And when he stood on the threshold of his own door she wasn't there.

No, he wasn't frightened. He couldn't tell me what he felt, but he left his door open all night because he couldn't bear to shut it on her. And he made no other attempt to go in to Pauline, he was so convinced that the phantasm of Rosamund would come again and stop him.

I don't know what sort of excuse he made to Pauline the next morning. He said she was very stiff and sulky all day, and no wonder. He was still infatuated with her, and I don't think that the phantasm of Rosamund had put him off Pauline in the least. In fact, he persuaded himself that the thing was nothing but a hallucination, due, no doubt, to his excitement.

Anyhow, he didn't expect to see it at the door again the next night.

Yes. It was there. Only, this time, he said, it drew aside to let him pass. It smiled at him, as if it were saying, "Go in, if you must, you'll see what'll happen."

He had no sense that it had followed him into the room, he felt certain that, this time, it would let him be.

It was when he approached Pauline's bed, which had been Rosamund's bed, that she appeared again, standing between it and him, and stretching out her arms to keep him back.

All that Pauline could see was her bridegroom backing and backing, then standing there, fixed, and the look on his face. That in itself was enough to frighten her.

She said, "What's the matter with you, Edward?"

He didn't move

"What are you standing there for? Why don't you come to bed?"

Then Marston seems to have lost his head and blurted it out.

"I can't. I can't."

"Can't what?" said Pauline from the bed.

"Can't sleep with you. She won't let me."

"She?"

"Rosamund My wife. She's there "

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"She's there, I tell you. She won't let me. She's pushing me back."

He says Pauline must have thought he was drunk or something. Remember, she *saw* nothing but Edward, his face, and his mysterious attitude. He must have looked very drunk.

She sat up in bed, with her hard, black eyes blazing away at him, and told him to leave the room that minute. Which he did.

The next day she had it out with him. I gathered that she kept on talking about the "state" he was in.

"You came to my room, Edward, in a *disgraceful* state"

I suppose Marston said he was sorry, but he couldn't help it, he wasn't drunk. He stuck to it that Rosamund was there. He had seen her. And Pauline said, if he wasn't drunk then he must be mad, and he said meekly, "Perhaps I *am* mad."

That set her off, and she broke out in a fury. He was no more mad than she was, but he didn't care for her; and he was making ridiculous excuses, shamming, to put her off. There was some other woman.

Marston asked her what on earth she supposed he'd married her for. Then she burst out crying and said she didn't know.

Then he seems to have made it up with Pauline. He managed to make her believe he wasn't lying, that he really had seen something, and between them they arrived at a rational explanation of the appearance. He had been overworking.

Rosamund's phantasm was nothing but a hallucination of his exhausted brain.

This theory carried him on till bedtime. Then, he says, he began to wonder what would happen, what Rosamund's phantasm would do next. Each morning his passion for Pauline had come back again, increased by frustration, and it worked itself up crescendo, towards night. Supposing he *had* seen Rosamund. He might see her again. He had become suddenly subject to hallucinations. But as long as you *knew* you were hallucinated you were all right.

So what they agreed to do that night was by way of precaution, in case the thing came again. It might even be sufficient in itself to prevent his seeing anything.

Instead of going in to Pauline he was to get into the room before she did, and she was to come to him there. That, they said, would break the spell. To make him feel even safer he meant to be in bed before Pauline came.

Well, he got into the room all right.

It was when he tried to get into bed that—he saw her (I mean Rosamund).

She was lying there, in his place next the window, her own place, lying in her immature childlike beauty and sleeping, the firm full bow of her mouth softened by sleep. She was perfect in every detail, the lashes of her shut eyelids golden on her white cheeks, the solid gold of her square fringe shining, and the great braided golden rope of her hair flung back on the pillow.

He knelt down by the bed and pressed his forehead into the bedclothes, close to her side. He declared he could feel her breathe.

He stayed there for the twenty minutes Pauline took to undress and come to him. He says the minutes stretched out like hours. Pauline found him still kneeling with his face pressed into the bedclothes. When he got up he staggered.

She asked him what he was doing and why he wasn't in bed. And he said, "It's no use I can't. I can't."

But somehow he couldn't tell her that Rosamund was there. Rosamund was too sacred, he couldn't talk about her. He only said

"You'd better sleep in my room to-night."

He was staring down at the place in the bed where he still saw Rosamund. Pauline couldn't have seen anything but the bedclothes, the sheet smoothed above an invisible breast, and the hollow in the pillow. She said she'd do nothing of the sort. She wasn't going to be frightened out of her own room. He could do as he liked.

He couldn't leave them there; he couldn't leave Pauline with Rosamund, and he couldn't leave Rosamund with Pauline. So he sat up in a chair with his back turned to the bed. No. He didn't make any attempt to go back. He says he knew she was still lying there, guarding his place, which was her place. The odd thing is that he wasn't in the least disturbed or frightened or surprised. He took the whole thing as a matter of course. And presently he dozed off into a sleep.

A scream woke him and the sound of a violent body leaping out of the bed and thudding on to its feet. He switched on the light and saw the bedclothes flung back and Pauline standing on the floor with her mouth open.

He went to her and held her. She was cold to the touch and shaking with terror, and her jaws dropped as if she was palsied.

She said, "Edward, there's something in the bed."

He glanced again at the bed. It was empty.

"There isn't," he said. "Look."

He stripped the bed to the foot-rail, so that she could see.

"There *was* something."

"Do you see it?"

"No. I felt it."

She told him. First something had come swinging, smack across her face. A thick, heavy rope of woman's hair. It had waked her. Then she had put out her hands and felt the body. A woman's body, soft and horrible; her fingers had sunk in the shallow breasts. Then she had screamed and jumped.

And she couldn't stay in the room. The room, she said, was "beastly."

She slept in Marston's room, in his small single bed, and he sat up with her all night, on a chair.

She believed now that he had really seen something, and she remembered that the library was beastly, too. Haunted

by something She supposed that was what she had felt. Very well Two rooms in the house were haunted, their bedroom and the library. They would just have to avoid those two rooms She had made up her mind, you see, that it was nothing but a case of an ordinary haunted house, the sort of thing you're always hearing about and never believe in till it happens to yourself Marston didn't like to point out to her that the house hadn't been haunted till she came into it.

The following night, the fourth night, she was to sleep in the spare room on the top floor, next to the servants, and Marston in his own room.

But Marston didn't sleep He kept on wondering whether he would or would not go up to Pauline's room. That made him horribly restless, and instead of undressing and going to bed, he sat up on a chair with a book. He wasn't nervous, but he had a queer feeling that something was going to happen, and that he must be ready for it, and that he'd better be dressed

It must have been soon after midnight when he heard the doorknob turning every slowly and softly

The door opened behind him and Pauline came in, moving without a sound, and stood before him It gave him a shock, for he had been thinking of Rosamund, and when he heard the doorknob turn it was the phantasm of Rosamund that he expected to see coming in. He says, for the first minute, it was this appearance of Pauline that struck him as the uncanny and unnatural thing

She had nothing, absolutely nothing on but a transparent white chiffony sort of dressing-gown. She was trying to undo it. He could see her hands shaking as her fingers fumbled with the fastenings

He got up suddenly, and they just stood there before each other, saying nothing, staring at each other. He was fascinated by her, by the sheer glamour of her body, gleaming white through the thin stuff, and by the movement of her fingers I think I've said she was a beautiful woman, and her beauty at that moment was overpowering.

And still he stared at her without saying anything It sounds as if their silence lasted quite a long time, but in reality it

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couldn't have been more than some fraction of a second

Then she began "Oh, Edward, for God's sake say something. Oughtn't I to have come?"

And she went on without waiting for an answer. "Are you thinking of *her*? Because, if—if you are, I'm not going to let her drive you away from me. . . . I'm not going to. . . . She'll keep on coming as long as we don't—Can't you see that this is the way to stop it. . . . ? When you take me in your arms"

She slipped off the loose sleeves of the chiffon thing and it fell to her feet. Marston says he heard a queer sound, something between a groan and a grunt, and was amazed to find that it came from himself.

He hadn't touched her yet—mind you, it went quicker than it takes to tell, it was still an affair of the fraction of a second—they were holding out their arms to each other, when the door opened again without a sound, and, without visible passage, the phantasm was there. It came incredibly fast, and thin at first, like a shaft of light sliding between them. It didn't do anything, there was no beating of hands, only, as it took on its full form, its perfect likeness of flesh and blood, it made its presence felt like a push, a force, driving them asunder.

Pauline hadn't seen it yet. She thought it was Marston who was beating her back. She cried out: "Oh, don't, don't push me away!" She stooped below the phantasm's guard and clung to his knees, writhing and crying For a moment it was a struggle between her moving flesh and that still, supernatural being.

And in that moment Marston realized that he hated Pauline She was fighting Rosamund with her gross flesh and blood, taking a mean advantage of her embodied state to beat down the heavenly, discarnate thing.

He called to her to let go

"It's not I," he shouted. "Can't you see her?"

Then, suddenly, she saw, and let go, and dropped, crouching on the floor and trying to cover herself This time she had given no cry.

The phantasm gave way; it moved slowly towards the door, and as it went it looked back over its shoulder at Marston, it trailed a hand, signalling to him to come

He went out after it, hardly aware of Pauline's naked body

that still writhed there, clutching at his feet as they passed, and drew itself after him, like a worm, like a beast, along the floor

She must have got up at once and followed them out onto the landing, for, as he went down the stairs behind the phantasm, he could see Pauline's face, distorted with lust and terror, peering at them above the starhead. She saw them descend the last flight, and cross the hall at the bottom and go into the library. The door shut behind them.

Something happened in there Marston never told me precisely what it was, and I didn't ask him. Anyhow, that finished it.

The next day Pauline ran away to her own people. She couldn't stay in Marston's house because it was haunted by Rosamund, and he wouldn't leave it for the same reason.

And she never came back, for she was not only afraid of Rosamund, she was afraid of Marston. And if she *had* come it wouldn't have been any good. Marston was convinced that, as often as he attempted to get to Pauline, something would stop him. Pauline certainly felt that, if Rosamund were pushed to it, she might show herself in some still more sinister and terrifying form. She knew when she was beaten.

And there was more in it than that. I believe he tried to explain it to her, said he had married her on the assumption that Rosamund was dead, but that now he knew she was alive, she was, as he put it, "there." He tried to make her see that if he had Rosamund he couldn't have *her* Rosamund's presence in the world annulled their contract.

You see I'm convinced that something *did* happen that night in the library I say, he never told me precisely what it was, but he once let something out. We were discussing one of Pauline's love-affairs (after the separation she gave him endless grounds for divorce).

"Poor Pauline," he said, "she thinks she's so passionate."

"Well," I said, "wasn't she?"

Then he burst out. "No. She doesn't know what passion is. None of you know. You haven't the faintest conception. You'd have to get rid of your bodies first. I didn't know until—"

He stopped himself. I think he was going to say, "until Rosamund came back and showed me" For he leaned for-

ward and whispered: "It isn't a localized affair at all . . . If you only knew—"

So I don't think it was just faithfulness to a revived memory. I take it there had been, behind that shut door, some experience, some terrible and exquisite contact. More penetrating than sight or touch More—more extensive. passion at all points of being

Perhaps the supreme moment of it, the ecstasy, only came when her phantasm had disappeared

He couldn't go back to Pauline after *that*.

Mary Elizabeth Counselman

The Tree's Wife

I smiled at my companion, Hettie Morrison, County Welfare investigator for the Bald Mountain district. When I dropped into her office that morning, mostly to dig up nostalgic old memories of our college days at the University of Virginia, I found her arguing over the telephone with a local mechanic "But I have to make a field trip this morning! . . . WHY can't you get the parts? Take them out of somebody else's car! . . . Oh, the devil with what you think wouldn't be right! This family may be starving . . . !"

Hettie had hung up, still sputtering, a gaunt severe-looking old maid with a heart as big as the Blue Ridge Mountains. She glanced up then, to see me grinning at her, jingling the car-keys of my new club-coupe by way of an invitation. We were such close friends, no words were needed—Hettie merely jerked a nod, slammed on her hat, and started out the door with me in tow.

"You'll be sorry," she warned me "The road I have to take is an old Indian trail—and if they had to get back and forth on *that*, no wonder they're called the Vanishing Americans! You'll break a spring!"

I looked so dismayed, pausing to unlock my first new car in ten years, that she closed one eye in a crafty look I knew so well, from days at college when she was about to ask the loan of my best hose.

"It's a dull trip, just routine field work. Of course you wouldn't be interested," she drawled casually, "in Florella Dabney—the girl who married a tree. We pass right by the Dabney place. No, no, dear, you're liable to scratch up that nice blue paint. And Holy Creek crosses the road four times, we'd have to drive through it, hub-deep. I always get stuck and have to—"

I scowled at my old friend, familiar with all her clever tricks of getting her way, but still unable to cope with them.

"Tree?" I demanded. "Did you say—? Married a —?"

"That's right," Hettie nodded with a smug grin. "It's a strange case—almost a legend up around Bald Mountain. Although," she added, blatantly climbing into my car, "it's not without precedent, in the old Greek legends Zeus was forever turning some girl into a spring or a flower, or some inanimate object, so his wife Hera wouldn't find out about his goings on. Even as late as the fifteenth century, there were proxy weddings, where some queen or other married her knight's sword because he was off at war. Then, there's an African tribe in which the men are married, at puberty, to some tree."

I grimaced impatiently, climbed into the coupe, and started it with a jerk. Hettie had aroused my interest, and well she knew it. She would get her ride over the wild, bushy crest of Bald Mountain—or I would never find out about that girl who married a tree.

An hour later, bouncing over a rocky trail pressed closely on both sides by scrub pine and mountain laurel, she began to tell me about Florella Dabney—and the bloody feud that, a trained psychiatrist might explain, had left her a mental case with a strange delusion.

The Dabneys (Hettie related) had built their cabin and begun to wrest a living out of the side of Bald Mountain about the time of Daniel Boone. Six generations of underfed, over-worked mountaineers had lived therein, planting a little, hunting a little, and raising a batch of children as wild as the foxes that made inroads on their chicken supply. Florella was the youngest daughter, a shy willowy child of fifteen, with flowing dark hair and big luminous dark eyes like a fawn. Barefoot, clad in the simple gingham shift that all mountain girls wore, she could be seen running down the steep side of Old Baldy, as nimbly as a city child might run along a sidewalk. Her older brothers and sisters married and moved away, her mother died, and Florella lived with her father now on the sparse farm.

On the other side of the mountain lived another such family of "old settlers," the Jenningses. As far back as anyone could

remember, there had been bad blood between the two, starting with a free-for-all over a load of cordwood, which had sent two Dabneys to the hospital and three Jenningses to jail. Both attended the little mountain church perched on the ridge that divided their farms, but no Jennings ever spoke to a Dabney, even at all-day singings, when everyone was pleasantly full of food and "home-brew." No Dabney would sit left of the aisle, and any baptizing that was done in Holy Creek, after a rousing revival meeting, had to be arranged with Jenningses and Dabneys immersed on alternate days. Reverend Posy Adkins, the lay preacher, recognized this as a regrettable but inevitable condition. And that was the law on Bald Mountain—up until the spring evening when Joe Ed Jennings and Florella Dabney "run off together."

When and how they had ever seen enough of each other to fall in love, neither family could imagine. Joe Ed was a stocky blond boy who could play a guitar and shoot the eye out of a possum at fifty yards—but not much else. What astonished everyone was Florella's regard for such a do-little, since she was halfway promised to a boy from Owl's Hollow. It was assumed, when a party of hunters saw them streaking through the woods one night, that Florella had been carried off by force, much against her will. She had gone out after one of the hogs, which had strayed. At midnight, when she had not returned, her pa, Lafe Dabney, went out to search for her, ran into the hunting party—and promptly stalked back to his cabin for his rifle.

He was starting out again, with murder in his close-set, mean little eyes, when a pair of frightened young people suddenly walked through the sagging front gate. With them was Preacher Adkins, dressed either for a buryin' or a marryin', with the Good Book clutched in a hand that trembled. But he spoke steadily.

"Lafe, these two young'nes has sinned. But the Lord's likely done forgave 'em already. Now they aim to marry, so don't try an' stop it!"

Without preamble, he motioned for Florella and Joe Ed to stand under a big whiteoak that grew in the front yard,

towering over the rough cabin and silhouetted darkly against the moonlit sky High up on the trunk, if Lafe had noticed, was cut a heart with the initials J.E J and F D

Solemnly, the old preacher began to intone the marriage ceremony, while Florella's pa stood there staring at them, his lean face growing darker with fury, his tight mouth working Hardly had the immortal words, "Do you take this man—?" been spoken, when he whipped the rifle to his shoulder and fired at Joe Ed, pointblank. The boy was dead as he crumpled up at his bride's small bare feet

"I'll larn you to go sparkin' our girl behind my back!" Lafe roared "You triflin' no-account!"

He never finished, for a second shot rang out in the quiet night. Lafe Dabney pitched forward on his face, crawled across the body of his prospective son-in-law, and fired twice toward the powder flash in the woods beyond the cabin A moment later, all hell broke loose It seems that Reverend Adkins had expected just such a blow-up Someone had carried the news to Joe Ed's pa Clem Jennings had also hastened to the spot, to stop the wedding The old preacher, fearing this, had notified "the law" The sheriff, with a hastily gathered posse, had showed up at the moment when Lafe and Clem fired at each other, over the body of young Joe Ed and the prostrate sobbing form of his near-bride.

In a matter of minutes, the posse had both fathers handcuffed and hauled off to jail But, behind them, they left a tragic tableau—little Florella weeping over the body of her lost lover, with old Reverend Adkins standing dumbly in the background Two of the posse had stayed behind to help with Joe Ed's body, which the weeping girl had begged the preacher to bury, then and there, "under our tree" It was there Joe Ed had first caught her and kissed her, holding his hand over her mouth and laughing, with Lafe not ten yards away It was there, in the night, that she had first told him she loved him—and promised to slip away with him, into the deep silent woods of Old Baldy, for a lover's tryst forbidden by both their families It was there, months later, terrified and ashamed, that she had sobbed out to him that she was with child She

knew there was nothing left but to kill herself. Her lover was a Jennings, and she had expected no more from him than a few moments of wild secret ecstasy.

But Joe Ed had surprised her. Fiercely protective and loyal, he had announced that, the following night, he would stand with her under the tree in the Dabneys' yard, and have Preacher Adkins marry them—right in front of old Lafe. His child must bear his name, the boy said proudly and tenderly, and he hoped it would be a fawn-eyed little girl exactly like Florella.

All this old Preacher Adkins related to the two members of the posse, while they took turns digging a grave for Joe Ed Jennings—at the foot of the big whiteoak under which he was to have been married. Florella stood numbly by, watching and no longer crying, like a trapped animal at last resigned to its bitter fate.

But, regarding her, the old lay-preacher suddenly remembered a story from his school days, a myth, a legend. Walking over to the girl, he took her hand quietly and led her over to the tree, where the two pitying neighbors were just patting the last spadeful of dirt over Joe Ed's crude grave.

"Daughter," the old preacher said, "I've heard tell of queens in the old days marryin' a sword that belonged to some feller that'd been killt in battle. Now, Joe Ed, he'd want you should go ahead and take his name—so I'm goin' t' make out like this-here tree is Joe Ed, him bein' buried underneath it. I want you two men," he faced the gravediggers solemnly, "to witness this-here marryin'—of Joe Ed Jennings and Florella Dabney." He raised his eyes humbly. "If hit's a wrong thing I'm doin', punish me, Lord. If hit's right, bless this-here ceremony!"

There in the moonlit night, the old preacher proceeded with that strange proxy wedding of a girl to a tree. The two members of the posse stood by, wide-eyed and amazed, as they heard Reverend Adkins repeat the familiar words of the marriage ceremony. Heard Florella's sobbing replies. And then heard—was it only wind in the great tree towering above them? Or was it? Both men later swore that what they heard sounded like a whispering voice. A man's voice,

Joe Ed's, coming from the depths of those thick green branches But (as Hettie remarked drily) it had been a hysterical night, and hysteria can play weird tricks on the human senses numerous times.

"Well? That isn't *all*?" I demanded as my car lurched madly into Holy Creek's third crossing and plunged wetly out again. "What happened to the girl? With her father in prison, who looked after her while—? Was the child all right?"

"Slow down, you idiot!" Hettie snapped at me pleasantly, clinging to the car door on her side "Yes, of course, the child was all right. A little girl I had Welfare send a doctor out here, when we got the message that Florella was in labor. She had been living on in her father's cabin, quite alone—for the simple reason that all her relatives and all of Joe Ed's were afraid to come near the place!"

I frowned, puzzled "Why?"

"Because of the tree," Hettie said blandly. "Word got around that it was haunted. That Joe Ed had 'gone into that oak' and—well, that it was alive. Sentient, that is. That it—didn't behave like a tree any more. I must say—look out for that rock, you goose! Want to wreck this thing?—I must say some of the things that happened were—odd, to say the least!"

I slowed down obediently, picking my way over the rocky road. Anything to keep Hettie on the story that had so captured my imagination!

"What things?" I demanded "Anybody can hear voices in the wind. Leaves rustling. Branches rubbing together."

"But," Hettie drawled, "just anybody can't see a tree catch a live rabbit, or a dove that has lit on a branch of it. Just anybody can't—"

"What?" I gaped at her. "I never heard of anything so ridiculous!" My attempted laugh sounded flat, however, even to my own ears "How on earth could—?"

"Don't ask me," Hettie said cheerfully. "All I know is, the lower branch of that big whiteoak kept Florella supplied with meat. Rabbits, doves, once a possum. They—they got choked, somehow. Got their necks caught in the twigs. She'd find them there, all ready to be cooked and eaten. The way any good mountaineer might trap to feed his family. So she got to

believing—that *he* caught them Joe Ed had quite a reputation as a hunter and trapper ”

“Good Lord!” I tried to laugh again “You’re not hinting—? The poor kid,” I broke off pityingly “But an experience like that would naturally affect her mind Living there all alone, too, with a baby!”

“Then,” Hettie went on pleasantly, “there was the fall day, real cold, when a neighbor woman dropped in Nosey old sister Just wanted to say something spiteful to Florella about the baby. When she was leaving, though—well,” Hettie chuckled, “it seems her coat got tangled in a tree branch that dipped down over the gate It yanked the coat right off her back, the way she told it. She lit out of there, screaming bloody-murder, and told everybody that Joe Ed took her coat for Florella! When the girl tried to return it to her, she wouldn’t touch it. Said it wasn’t her best coat, anyhow, and she wasn’t going to argue with a tree!”

“Oh no!” I shook my head, laughing—but still trying to ignore a small shiver that kept running down my spine “These mountain people are awfully superstitious, aren’t they? Naturally, it was just the woman’s fear that made her think—”

“Maybe,” Hettie said drily, “but it wasn’t fear that snatched my new hat off last spring, when I happened to walk under that tree Checking up on Florella—she’s a hardship case, of course Yessir,” she said in a queer tone “Big limb swooped down and snatched that bonnet right off my head I couldn’t reach it, and Florella couldn’t climb up and get it. Too soon after the baby’s arrival, poor girl was still kind of weak. But the way she giggled, and started talking to that tree like it was a person! Honestly, it made my flesh crawl, she was so matter of fact about it! ‘Joe Ed, you rascal,’ she said, ‘give Miss Hettie back her bonnet, now! I don’t need no fancy clothes Me and the baby’s doin’ just fine ’ ” Hettie peered at me, sheepishly “Way she said it made me feel like—like a selfish old turkey-gobbler! Besides, a hat like that was too pretty for an old hatchet-face like me But it did give me a turn, I’ll have to admit! When—” she gulped slightly, “when I told Florella she could have the hat, it—it immediately fell out of the tree Plop! Right smack on that girl’s head! I must say,” she added crossly, “it was very becoming Probably the

first one she ever owned, poor little thing! Lafe was a stingy old coot, Florella's mother never had a rag she didn't weave herself!"

I turned the steering wheel sharply to avoid a raccoon ambling across the trail. Then I peered at Hettie.

"Go on," I said grimly. "Tell me how the tree shed its wood in stacks, so Florella wouldn't have to chop any!"

Hettie chuckled "Oh, no Mountain men take it for granted that their wives must work like mules All they do is feed 'em, shelter 'em, and protect 'em—with an occasional pretty thrown in when they feel in a generous mood That's what Florella expected from her tree-husband, and that's what she got. Though I suppose a psychologist would say her delusion gave her a sense of security that merely made her able to fend for herself. Lots of people need a crutch for their self-confidence—if it's only a lucky coin they carry around. Coincidence and superstition, hm?"

"Well," my friend smiled, "I *am* obliged to you for the lift. We had a message that Kirby Marsh, a farmer who lives near the Dabney place, got in a fight with somebody and crawled home, pretty banged up His wife is bedridden, so they'll need help if he's seriously injured You were a life-saver to bring me. This is the turn"; she broke off abruptly, grinning at me with a sly twinkle in her eye. "The Dabney farm is just around this bend."

I slowed down, feeling again that cold shiver run down my spine as we rounded the curve An old cabin of square-hewn logs perched on the mountainside a few yards above the road, with the usual well in the yard and the usual small truck-garden in back. A huge whiteoak towered over the gate of a sagging rail fence Its sturdy trunk leaned a bit toward the house in a curiously protective manner, shading the worn front stoop with its thick dark-green foliage

I braked the car outside the gate, and Hettie grinned at my expression

"There it is," she announced drily. "There's where the girl lives who married a tree And that's the tree That's *him*"

I got out of the coupe and walked warily to the gate Hettie climbed out stiffly, and called, in her pleasantly harsh voice.

"Hello? Hello the house?" in traditional mountain style

There was no answer, but all at once I saw a quilt pallet spread under the oak Hettie had indicated as "*him*" A fair-haired baby girl was sprawled on the folded quilt, gurgling and cooing. She looked to be about two years old, with the sturdy good health of most mountain children, despite their skimpy diet and constant exposure to the elements.

I stood watching her for a moment, charmed by the picture she made. Then I frowned.

"She's too young to be left alone," I muttered. "Where's her mother?"

"Oh, out picking blackberries, I guess" Hettie shrugged. "Josie's all right, though Her father's minding her," she added with another impish grin at my expression. "Hello!" she called again "Florella!"

At that moment a lovely slender girl came running around the house, her feet bare, her dark hair flying. There was a sprig of laurel over her ear, and blackberry stains on her brown fingers. I stared at her, thinking how like a dryad she looked—wild, free, and happily unafraid.

"Oh! Howdy, Miss Hettie!" she greeted my friend warmly. "Come in and set. Who's that with ye? Kinfolk?"

Hettie introduced me as a school chum, with no mention of the fact that I wrote stories of the supernatural for my bread and butter. We entered the gate, and Hettie stooped over to pat the baby, proffering a peppermint from the endless supply she always seems to carry around. I fidgeted beside her, at a loss for conversation with this pretty normal-looking young mother who, from all Hettie had told me, was as crazy as a coot. Once, nervously, I started as a limb of the great tree under which we stood brushed my shoulder, plucking at my scarf. On impulse, I took it off and gave it to the girl, who beamed and thanked me shyly, then tied it proudly around her own neck. I caught Hettie's eye at that moment—and flushed as she grinned, winked, and glanced up at the giant tree.

Then she turned to Florella, lovelier than ever in my blue chiffon scarf—and with no more madness in her face than in mine.

"I got word that Kirby Marsh was hurt in a fight," my

friend said conversationally. "Anybody over there looking after his wife and kids? Heard the doctor came, and took Kirby to the hospital with concussion and a sprained shoulder. Must have been some fight, to have—"

Hettie broke off, noticing the girl's sudden expression of regret beyond the politeness expected of a neighbor. Florella ducked her head suddenly, with a rueful little smile.

"Yes, ma'am," she said simply. "He come over here to our place late last night, and went to pesterin' me. Oh, not that Kirby ain't a real nice feller," she apologized for her neighbor gently, "exceptin' when he's likkered up I told him to leave go o' me," she added with wifely dignity. "Told him Joe Ed wouldn't like it. But he wouldn't listen. So I run out to Joe Ed, with it a-stormin' awful. He'd been a'bangin' on the roof, to warn Kirby, but he likely thought 'twas only the wind."

I gulped, racked with pity, and threw a glance at my friend.

"Then—?" Hettie prompted softly, in an odd tone. "You ran out into the yard? Kirby ran after you, and—?"

"And Joe Ed, he whanged him over the head," the girl finished, half apologetic, half proud, as any other woman might speak of a husband who had stoutly defended her honor. "He like to busted Kirby's scull wide open. But he hadn't ought to've tried to kiss me," she defended primly. "Ought he, Miss Hettie? And me a married woman with a young'ne!"

"No, dear," Hettie answered, in the gentlest voice I have ever heard her use. "No—Joe Ed did the right thing. I don't think Kirby was badly injured, but somebody has to look after his folks while he's in the hospital. Did you go over and see his wife today?"

"Yes ma'am," the girl said quietly. "But they wouldn't let me in. I reckon, on account they was scared. I mean, of Joe Ed. But he wouldn't hurt nobody less'n they was botherin' me or the baby! He's real good-hearted."

"Yes," my friend said softly. "I understand. Well—don't worry about it, dear. Next time Kirby will know better! I rather imagine," she chuckled, "that this experience will keep him sober for some time!"

The girl nodded shyly, and bent to pick up the child. But small Josie toddled away from her and ran around the great tree to where a low limb dipped almost to the ground.

"Pal" she chirped suddenly, holding up her chubby arms to the giant oak. "Fing baby! Fing high, Pal!"

Florella laughed, shaking her head mildly and calling: "No! No, now, Joe Ed—you're liable to drop that young'un! Don't ye—"

But as I stared, that low limb dipped down as under unseen pressure. The child, Josie, seized it and, as I gasped at the spectacle, was tossed ten feet off the ground, as if a gust of wind had blown the branch skyward, it had scooped up the baby, swinging her high above us. Then, as gently, it let her down again, while the young mother shook her head again in laughing reproof. My scalp crawled at her matter-of-fact, unself-conscious manner.

"Joe Ed's always a-doin' that," she said pleasantly. "She loves it. Why, Miss Hettie!" she broke off, pouting as I sidled pointedly back toward the gate, "I thought you-all would stay for dinner! Joe Ed caught me a rabbit, and I was just fixin' to fry it real nice and brown Cain't ye stay?"

But I was out the gate and climbing into my car by that time, shaking my head covertly and beckoning for Hettie to come away. For some reason—which I will always firmly deny—my teeth were clicking like castanets. And I kept glancing up nervously at that tall spreading oak tree, brooding over the little mountain cabin, and the woman and child who lived there alone.

Alone—?

"Pitiful case, isn't it?" Hettie murmured cheerfully, as she climbed into the car and waved goodbye to Florella Dabney—or "Mrs Joseph Edward Jennings," as she was listed in the Welfare files. "I mean," my friend expanded, "the way that poor girl lives, with her baby. From hand to mouth, and the prey of—well, men like Kirby. She'd be so lonely and frightened if it weren't for that pathetic delusion of hers. And she's got the child to believing it now! Guess you noticed her swinging on that tree—she called it 'Pal' Stout branch, to pick up a child that heavy, wasn't it?" she drawled carelessly. "Wind

blew it, I guess—like the other night, when it whacked Kirby Marsh over the head Awful windy up here on Old Baldy." She peeked at me slyly, lips twitching

I glared at her and stepped on the gas, aware of the cold perspiration that had sprung out on my forehead. Because it was not windy. It was close and very still—and beside me, Hettie was chuckling softly as I glanced back at the barren little farm Except for one low limb of that giant oak tree—again tossing that happy child playfully into the air while its mother looked on, lifting it gently, like a man's strong protective arms—not a leaf was stirring as far as we could see over the rugged mountainside.

The Pavilion

There was never a moment's doubt in her own mind. So she said afterwards. And everyone agreed that she had concealed her feelings with true womanly discretion. Her friend and confidant, Amelia Davenant, was at any rate completely deceived. Amelia was one of those featureless blondes who seem born to be overlooked. She adored her beautiful friend, and never, from first to last, could see any fault in her, except, perhaps, on the evening when the real things of the story happened. And even in that matter she owned at the time that it was only that her darling Ernestine did not understand.

Ernestine was a prettyish girl with the airs, so irresistible and misleading, of a beauty, most people said that she was beautiful, and she certainly managed, with extraordinary success, to produce the illusion of beauty. Quite a number of plainish girls achieve that effect nowadays. The freedom of modern dress and coiffure and the increasing confidence in herself which the modern girl experiences, aid her in fostering the illusion, but in the sixties, when everyone wore much the same sort of bonnet, when your choice in coiffure was limited to bandeaux or ringlets, and the crinoline was your only wear, something very like genius was needed to deceive the world in the matter of your personal charms. Ernestine had that genius, hers was the smiling, ringleted, dark-haired, dark-eyed, sparkling type.

Amelia had blond bandeaux and kind appealing blue eyes, rather too small and rather too dull, her hands and ears were beautiful, and she kept them out of sight as much as possible. In our times the blond hair would have been puffed out to make a frame for the forehead, a little too high; a certain shade of blue and a certain shade of boldness would have her eyes effective. And the beautiful hands would have learned that flower-like droop of the wrist so justly and so universally admired. But as it was, Amelia was very nearly plain, and in

her secret emotional self-communings told herself that she was ugly. It was she who, at the age of fourteen, composed the remarkable poem beginning:

*I know that I am ugly. did I make
The face that is the laugh and jest of all?*

and goes on, after disclaiming any personal responsibility for the face, to entreat the kind earth to "cover it away from mocking eyes," and to "let the daisies blossom where it lies."

Amelia did not want to die, and her face was not the laugh and jest, or indeed the special interest, of anyone. All that was poetic license Amelia had read perhaps a little too much poetry of "*Quand je suis morte, mes amies, plantez un saule au cimetière*", but really life was a very good thing to Amelia, especially when she had a new dress and someone paid her a compliment. But she went on writing verses extolling the advantages of The Tomb, and grovelling metrically at the feet of One who was Another's until that summer, when she was nineteen, and went to stay with Ernestine at Doricourt. Then her Muse took flight, scared, perhaps, by the possibility, suddenly and threateningly presented, of being asked to inspire verse about the real things of life.

At any rate, Amelia ceased to write poetry about the time when she and Ernestine and Ernestine's aunt went on a visit to Doricourt, where Frederick Powell lived with his aunt. It was not one of those hurried motor-fed excursions which we have now, and call week-ends, but a long leisurely visit, when all the friends of the static aunt called on the dynamic aunt, and both returned the calls with much state, a big barouche and a pair of fat horses. There were croquet parties and archery parties and little dances, all pleasant informal little gaieties arranged without ceremony among people who lived within driving distance of each other and knew each other's tastes and incomes and family history as well as they knew their own. The habit of importing huge droves of strangers from distant counties for brief harrying raids did not then obtain. There was instead a wide and constant circle of pleasant people with an unflagging stream of gaiety, mild indeed, but delightful to unjaded palates.

And at Doricourt life was delightful even on the days when there was no party. It was perhaps more delightful to Ernestine than to her friend, but even so, the one least pleased was Ernestine's aunt.

"I do think," she said to the other aunt whose name was Julia—"I daresay it is not so to you, being accustomed to Mr. W. Frederick, of course, from his childhood, but I always find gentlemen in the house so unsettling, especially young gentlemen, and when there are young ladies also. One is always on the *qui vive* for excitement."

"Of course," said Aunt Julia, with the air of a woman of the world, "living as you and dear Ernestine do, with only females in the house . . ."

"We hang up an old coat and hat of my brother's on the hatstand in the hall," Aunt Emmeline protested.

"The presence of gentlemen in the house must be a little unsettling. For myself, I am inured to it. Frederick has so many friends Mr. Thesiger, perhaps, the greatest I believe him to be a most worthy young man, but peculiar." She leaned forward across her bright-tinted Berlin woolwork and spoke impressively, the needle with its trailing red poised in air. "You know, I hope you will not think it indelicate of me to mention such a thing, but dear Frederick . . . your dear Ernestine would have been in every way so suitable."

"Would have been?" Aunt Emmeline's tortoise-shell shuttle ceased its swift movement among the white loops and knots of her tatting.

"Well, my dear," said the other aunt, a little shortly, "you must surely have noticed . . ."

"You don't mean to suggest that Amelia . . . I thought Mr. Thesiger and Amelia . . ."

"Amelia! I really must say! No, I was alluding to Mr. Thesiger's attentions to dear Ernestine. Most marked. In dear Frederick's place I should have found some excuse for shortening Mr. Thesiger's visit. But, of course, I cannot interfere. Gentlemen must manage these things for themselves. I only hope that there will be none of that trifling with the most holy affections of others which . . ."

The less valuable aunt cut in hotly with: "Ernestine's incapable of anything so unladylike!"

"Just what I was saying," the other rejoined blandly, got up and drew the blind a little lower, for the afternoon sun was glowing on the rosy wreaths of the drawing-room carpet.

Outside in the sunshine Frederick was going his best to arrange his own affairs. He had managed to place himself beside Miss Ernestine Meutys on the stone steps of the pavilion, but then, Mr Thesiger lay along the lower step at her feet, a very good position for looking up into her eyes. Amelia was beside him, but then it never seemed to matter whom Amelia sat beside.

They were talking about the pavilion on whose steps they sat, and Amelia who often asked uninteresting questions had wondered how old it was. It was Frederick's pavilion after all, and he felt this when his friend took the words out of his mouth and used them on his own account, even though he did give the answer in the form of an appeal.

"The foundations are Tudor, aren't they?" he said. "Wasn't it an observatory or laboratory or something of that sort in Fat Henry's time?"

"Yes," said Frederick, "there was some story about a wizard or an alchemist or something, and it was burned down, and then they rebuilt it in its present style."

"The Italian style, isn't it?" said Thesiger, "but you can hardly see what it is now, for the creeper."

"Virginia creeper, isn't it?" Amelia asked, and Frederick said "Yes, Virginia creeper." Thesiger said it looked more like a South American plant, and Ernestine said Virginia was in South America and that was why "I know, because of the war," she said modestly, and nobody smiled or answered. There were manners in those days.

"There's a ghost story about it surely," Thesiger began again, looking up at the dark closed doors of the pavilion.

"Not that I ever heard of," said the pavilion's owner. "I think the country people invented the tale because there have always been so many rabbits and weasels and things found dead near it. And once a dog, my uncle's favourite spaniel. But of course that's simply because they get entangled in the Virginia creeper—you see how fine and big it is—and can't get out, and die as they do in traps. But the villagers prefer to think it's ghosts."

"I thought there was a real ghost story," Thesiger persisted Ernestine said "A ghost story. How delicious! Do tell it, Mr Dericourt. This is just the place for a ghost story. Out of doors and the sun shining, so that we can't *really* be frightened."

Dericourt protested again that he knew no story.

"That's because you never read, dear boy," said Eugene Thesiger "That library of yours There's a delightful book—did you never notice it?—brown tree calf with your arms on it, the head of the house writes the history of the house as far as he knows it. There's a lot in that book. It began in Tudor times—1515 to be exact."

"Queen Elizabeth's time," Ernestine thought that made it so much more interesting "And was the ghost story in that?"

"It isn't exactly a ghost story," said Thesiger "It's only that the pavilion seems to be an unlucky place to sleep in."

"Haunted?" Frederick asked, and added that he must look up that book.

"Not haunted exactly Only several people who have slept the night there went on sleeping."

"Dead, he means," said Ernestine, and it was left for Amelia to ask

"Does the book tell anything particular about how the people died? What killed them, or anything?"

"There are suggestions," said Thesiger, "but there, it is a gloomy subject I don't know why I started it. Should we have time for a game of croquet before tea, Dericourt?"

"I wish you'd read the book and tell me the stories," Ernestine said to Frederick, apart, over the croquet balls

"I will," he answered fervently, "you've only to tell me what you want."

"Or perhaps Mr Thesiger will tell us another time—in the twilight Since people like twilight for ghosts Will you, Mr Thesiger?" She spoke over her blue muslin shoulder

Frederick certainly meant to look up the book, but he delayed till after supper, the half-hour before bed when he and Thesiger put on their braided smoking-jackets and their braided smoking-caps with the long yellow tassels, and smoked the cigars which were, in those days still, more of a luxury

than a necessity. Ordinarily, of course, these were smoked out of doors, or in the smoking-room, a stuffy little den littered with boots and guns and yellow-backed railway novels. But to-night Frederick left his friend in that dingy hutch, and went alone to the library, found the book and took it to the circle of light made by the colza lamp.

"I can skim through it in half an hour," he said, and wound up the lamp and lighted his second cigar. Then he opened the shutters and windows, so that the room should not smell of smoke in the morning. Those were the days of consideration for the ladies who had not yet learned that a cigarette is not exclusively a male accessory like a beard or a bass voice.

But when, his preparations completed, he opened the book, he was compelled to say "Pshaw!" Nothing short of this could relieve his feelings (You know the expression I mean, though of course it isn't pronounced as it's spelt, any more than Featherstonehaugh or St Maur are.)

"Pshaw!" said Frederick, fluttering the pages. His remark was justified. The earlier part of the book was written in the beautiful script of the early sixteenth century, that looks so plain and is so impossible to read, and the later pages, though the handwriting was clear and Italian enough, left Frederick helpless, for the language was Latin, and Frederick's Latin was limited to the particular passages he had "been through" at his private school. He recognised a word here and there, *mors*, for instance, and *pallidus* and *pavor* and *arcانum*, just as you or I might; but to read the complicated stuff and make sense of it . . . ! Frederick said something just a shade stronger than "Pshaw!"—"Botheration!" I think it was; replaced the book on the shelf, closed the shutters and turned out the lamp. He thought he would ask Thesiger to translate the thing, but then again he thought he wouldn't. So he went to bed wishing that he had happened to remember more of the Latin so painfully beaten into the best years of his boyhood.

And the story of the pavilion was, after all, told by Thesiger.

There was a little dance at Doricourt next evening, a *carpe-dance*, they called it. The furniture was pushed back against the walls, and the tightly stretched Axminster car-

pet was not so bad to dance on as you might suppose That, you see, was before the days of polished floors and large rugs with loose edges that you can catch your feet in A carpet was a carpet in those days, well and truly laid, conscientiously exact to the last least recess and fitting the floor like a skin And on this quite tolerable surface the young people danced very happily, some ten or twelve couples The old people did not dance in those days, except sometimes a quadrille of state to "open the ball." They played cards in a room provided for the purpose, and in the dancing-room three or four kindly middle-aged ladies were considered to provide ample chaperonage You were not even expected to report yourself to your chaperon at the conclusion of a dance It was not like a real ball And even in those far-off days there were conservatories

It was on the steps of the conservatory, not the steps leading from the dancing-room, but the steps leading to the garden, that the story was told The four young people were sitting together, the girls' crinolined flounces spreading round them like huge pale roses, the young men correct in their high-shouldered coats and white cravats Ernestine had been very kind to both the men—a little too kind, perhaps, who can tell? At any rate, there was in their eyes exactly that light which you may imagine in the eyes of rival stags in the mating season It was Ernestine who asked Frederick for the story, and Thesiger who, at Amelia's suggestion, told it

"It's quite a number of stories," he said, "and yet it's really all the same story The first man to sleep in the pavilion slept there ten years after it was built He was a friend of the alchemist or astrologer who built it He was found dead in the morning There seemed to have been a struggle His arms bore the marks of cords No, they never found any cords He died from loss of blood There were curious wounds That was all the rude leeches of the day could report to the bereaved survivors of the deceased"

"How funny you are, Mr Thesiger," said Ernestine with that celebrated soft low laugh of hers When Ernestine was elderly, many people thought her stupid When she was young, no one seems to have been of this opinion.

"And the next?" asked Amelia

"The next was sixty years later. It was a visitor that time, too. And he was found dead with just the same marks, and the doctors said the same thing. And so it went on. There have been eight deaths altogether—unexplained deaths. Nobody has slept in it now for over a hundred years. People seem to have a prejudice against the place as a sleeping apartment. I can't think why."

"Isn't he simply killing?" Ernestine asked Amelia, who said:

"And doesn't anyone know how it happened?" No one answered till Ernestine repeated the question in the form of: "I suppose it was just accident?"

"It was a curiously recurrent accident," said Thesiger, and Frederick, who throughout the conversation had said the right things at the right moment, remarked that it did not do to believe all these old legends. Most old families had them, he believed. Frederick had inherited Doricourt from an unknown great-uncle of whom in life he had not so much as heard, but he was very strong on the family tradition. "I don't attach any importance to these tales myself."

"Of course not. All the same," said Thesiger deliberately, "you wouldn't care to pass a night in that pavilion."

"No more would you," was all Frederick found on his lips.

"I admit that I shouldn't enjoy it," said Eugene, "but I'll bet you a hundred you don't *do* it."

"Done," said Frederick.

"Oh, Mr. Doricourt," breathed Ernestine, a little shocked at betting "before ladies."

"Don't!" said Amelia, to whom, of course, no one paid any attention, "don't do it."

You know how, in the midst of flower and leafage, a snake will suddenly, surprisingly rear a head that threatens? So, amid friendly talk and laughter, a sudden fierce antagonism sometimes looks out and vanishes again, surprising most of all the antagonists. This antagonism spoke in the tones of both men, and after Amelia had said, "Don't," there was a curiously breathless little silence. Ernestine broke it. "Oh," she said, "I do wonder which of you will win. I should like them both to win, wouldn't you, Amelia? Only I suppose that's not always possible, is it?"

Both gentlemen assured her that in the case of bets it was very rarely possible

"Then I wish you wouldn't," said Ernestine "You could both pass the night there, couldn't you, and be company for each other? I don't think betting for such large sums is quite the thing, do you, Amelia?"

Amelia said No, she didn't, but Eugene had already begun to say

"Let the bet be off then, if Miss Meutys doesn't like it. That suggestion is invaluable But the thing itself needn't be off Look here, Doricourt I'll stay in the pavilion from one to three and you from three to five Then honour will be satisfied How will that do?"

The snake had disappeared

"Agreed," said Frederick, "and we can compare impressions afterwards That will be quite interesting "

Then someone came and asked where they had all got to, and they went in and danced some more dances Ernestine danced twice with Frederick and drank iced sherry and water and they said good-night and lighted their bedroom candles at the table in the hall

"I do hope they won't," Amelia said as the girls sat brushing their hair at the two large white muslin frilled dressing-tables in the room they shared

"Won't what?" said Ernestine, vigorous with the brush

"Sleep in that hateful pavilion I wish you'd ask them not to, Ernestine They'd mind, if you asked them."

"Of course I will if you like, dear," said Ernestine cordially She was always the soul of good nature "But I don't think you ought to believe in ghost stories, not really "

"Why not?"

"Oh, because of the Bible and going to church and all that," said Ernestine "Do you really think Rowland's Macassar has made any difference to my hair?"

"It is just as beautiful as it always was," said Amelia, twisting up her own little ashen-blond handful. "What was that?"

That was a sound coming from the little dressing-room There was no light in that room Amelia went into the little room though Ernestine said "Oh, don't! how can you? It

might be a ghost or a rat or something," and as she went she whispered "Hush!"

The window of the little room was open and she leaned out of it. The stone sill was cold to her elbows through her print dressing-jacket.

Ernestine went on brushing her hair. Amelia heard a movement below the window and listened. "To-night will do," someone said.

"It's too late," said someone else.

"If you're afraid, it will always be too late or too early," said someone. And it was Thesiger.

"You know I'm not afraid," the other one, who was Dori-court, answered hotly.

"An hour for each of us will satisfy honour," said Thesiger carelessly. "The girls will expect it. I couldn't sleep. Let's do it now and get it over. Let's see. Oh, damn it!"

A faint click had sounded.

"Dropped my watch I forgot the chain was loose. It's all right though; glass not broken even. Well, are you game?"

"Oh, yes, if you insist. Shall I go first, or you?"

"I will," said Thesiger. "That's only fair, because I suggested it. I'll stay till half-past one or a quarter to two, and then you come on. See?"

"Oh, all right. I think it's silly, though," said Frederick.

Then the voices ceased. Amelia went back to the other girl.

"They're going to do it to-night."

"Are they, dear?" Ernestine was placid as ever. "Do what?"

"Sleep in that horrible pavilion."

"How do you know?"

Amelia explained how she knew.

"Whatever can we do?" she added.

"Well, dear, suppose we go to bed," suggested Ernestine helpfully. "We shall hear all about it in the morning."

"But suppose anything happens?"

"What could happen?"

"Oh, *anything*," said Amelia. "Oh, I do wish they wouldn't! I shall go down and ask them not to."

"*Amelia!*" the other girl was at last aroused. "You *couldn't*."

I shouldn't *let* you dream of doing anything so unladylike. What would the gentlemen think of you?"

The question silenced Amelia, but she began to put on her so lately discarded bodice.

"I won't go if you think I oughtn't," she said.

"Forward and fast, auntie would call it," said the other. "I am almost sure she would."

"But I'll keep dressed I shan't disturb you I'll sit in the dressing-room. I *can't* go to sleep while he's running into this awful danger."

"Which he?" Ernestine's voice was very sharp. "And there isn't any danger?"

"Yes, there is," said Amelia sullenly, "and I mean *them*. Both of them."

Ernestine said her prayers and got into bed. She had put her hair in curl-papers which became her like a wreath of white roses.

"I don't think auntie will be pleased," she said, "when she hears that you sat up all night watching young gentlemen. Good-night, dear!"

"Good-night, darling," said Amelia. "I know you don't understand. It's all right."

She sat in the dark by the dressing-room window. There was no moon, but the starlight lay gray on the dew of the park, and the trees massed themselves in bunches of a darker gray, deepening to black at the roots of them. There was no sound to break the stillness, except the little cracklings of twigs and rustlings of leaves as birds or little night wandering beasts moved in the shadows of the garden, and the sudden creakings that furniture makes if you sit alone with it and listen in the night's silence.

Amelia sat on and listened, listened. The pavilion showed in broken streaks of pale grey against the wood, that seemed to be clinging to it in dark patches. But that, she reminded herself, was only the creeper. She sat there for a very long time, not knowing how long a time it was. For anxiety is a poor chronometer, and the first ten minutes had seemed an hour. She had no watch. Ernestine had—and slept with it under her pillow. The stable clock was out of order, the man had been

sent for to see to it There was nothing to measure time's flight by, and she sat there rigid, straining her ears for a footfall on the grass, straining her eyes to see a figure come out of the dark pavilion and across the dew-grey grass towards the house And she heard nothing, saw nothing

Slowly, imperceptibly, the grey of the sleeping trees took on faint dreams of colour The sky turned faint above the trees, the moon perhaps was coming out The pavilion grew more clearly visible It seemed to Amelia that something moved along the leaves that surrounded it, and she looked to see him come out But he did not come

"I wish the moon would really shine," she told herself And suddenly she knew that the sky was clear and that this growing light was not the moon's cold shiver, but the growing light of dawn.

She went quickly into the other room, put her hand under the pillow of Ernestine, and drew out the little watch with the diamond "E" on it

"A quarter to three," she said aloud Ernestine moved and grunted

There was no hesitation about Amelia now Without another thought for the ladylike and the really suitable, she lighted her candle and went quickly down the stairs, paused a moment in the hall, and so out through the front door She passed along the terrace The feet of Frederick protruded from the open French window of the smoking-room. She set down her candle on the terrace—it burned clearly enough in that clear air—went up to Frederick as he slept, his head between his shoulders and his hands loosely hanging, and shook him

"Wake up," she said—"Wake up! Something's happened! It's a quarter to three and he's not come back."

"Who's not what?" Frederick asked sleepily.

"Mr Thesiger The pavilion "

"Thesiger?—the . You, Miss Davenant? I beg your pardon I must have dropped off"

He got up unsteadily, gazing dully at this white apparition still in evening dress with pale hair now no longer wreathed

"What is it?" he said "Is anybody ill?"

Briefly and very urgently Amelia told him what it was, implored him to go at once and see what had happened If he

had been fully awake, her voice and her eyes would have told him many things.

"He said he'd come back," he said. "Hadn't I better wait? You go back to bed, Miss Davenant. If he doesn't come in half an hour . . ."

"If you don't go this minute," said Amelia tensely, "I shall."

"Oh, well, if you insist," Frederick said "He has simply fallen asleep as I did. Dear Miss Davenant, return to your room, I beg. In the morning when we are all laughing at this false alarm, you will be glad to remember that Mr. Thesiger does not know of your anxiety."

"I hate you," said Amelia gently, "and I am going to see what has happened. Come or not, as you like."

She caught up the silver candlestick and he followed its wavering gleam down the terrace steps and across the grey dewy grass.

Half-way she paused, lifted the hand that had been hidden among her muslin flounces and held it out to him with a big Indian dagger in it.

"I got it out of the hall," she said "If there's any *real* danger. Anything living, I mean. I thought . . . But I know I couldn't use it. Will you take it?"

He took it, laughing kindly.

"How romantic you are," he said admiringly and looked at her standing there in the mungled gold and grey of dawn and candlelight. It was as though he had never seen her before.

They reached the steps of the pavilion and stumbled up them. The door was closed but not locked. And Amelia noticed that the trails of creeper had not been disturbed, they grew across the doorway, as thick as a man's finger, some of them.

"He must have got in by one of the windows," Frederick said. "Your dagger comes in handy, Miss Davenant."

He slashed at the wet sticky green stuff and put his shoulder to the door. It yielded at a touch and they went in.

The one candle lighted the pavilion hardly at all, and the dusky light that oozed in through the door and windows helped very little. And the silence was thick and heavy.

"Thesiger!" said Frederick, clearing his throat. "Thesiger! Hullo! Where are you?"

Thesiger did not say where he was. And then they saw.

There were low seats to the windows, and between the windows low stone benches ran. On one of these something dark, something dark and in places white, confused the outline of the carved stone.

"Thesiger," said Frederick again in the tone a man uses to a room that he is almost sure is empty "Thesiger!"

But Amelia was bending over the bench. She was holding the candle crookedly so that it flared and guttered.

"Is he there?" Frederick asked, following her, "is that him? Is he asleep?"

"Take the candle," said Amelia, and he took it obediently. Amelia was touching what lay on the bench. Suddenly she screamed. Just one scream, not very loud. But Frederick remembers just how it sounded. Sometimes he hears it in dreams and wakes moaning, though he is an old man now and his old wife says "What is it, dear?" and he says: "Nothing, my Ernestine, nothing."

Directly she had screamed she said "He's dead," and fell on her knees by the bench. Frederick saw that she held something in her arms.

"Perhaps he isn't," she said "Fetch someone from the house, brandy—send for a doctor. Oh, go, go, go!"

"I can't leave you here," said Frederick with thoughtful propriety, "suppose he revives?"

"He will not revive," said Amelia dully, "go, go, go! Do as I tell you. Go! If you don't go," she added suddenly and amazingly, "I believe I shall kill you. It's all your doing."

The astounding sharp injustice of this stung Frederick into action.

"I believe he's only fainted or something," he said "When I've roused the house and everyone has witnessed your emotion you will regret . . ."

She sprang to her feet and caught the knife from him and raised it, awkwardly, clumsily, but with keen threatening, not to be mistaken or disregarded. Frederick went.

When Frederick came back, with the groom and the gardener (he hadn't thought it well to disturb the ladies), the pavilion was filled full of white revealing daylight. On the bench lay a dead man, and kneeling by him a living woman on whose warm breast his cold and heavy head lay pil-

lowed. The dead man's hands were full of the green crushed leaves, and thick twining tendrils were about his wrists and throat. A wave of green seemed to have swept from the open window to the bench where he lay.

The groom and the gardener and the dead man's friend looked and looked.

"Looks like as if he'd got himself entangled in the creeper and lost 'is 'ead," said the groom, scratching his own.

"How'd the creeper get in, though? That's what I says," it was the gardener who said it.

"Through the window," said Doricourt, moistening his lips with his tongue.

"The window was shut, though, when I come by at five yesterday," said the gardener stubbornly. "'Ow did it get all that way since five?"

They looked at each other, voicing, silently, impossible things.

The woman never spoke. She sat there in the white ring of her crinolined dress like a broken white rose. But her arms were round Thesiger and she would not move them.

When the doctor came, he sent for Ernestine who came, flushed and sleepy-eyed and very frightened, and shocked.

"You're upset, dear," she said to her friend, "and no wonder. How brave of you to come out with Mr Doricourt to see what happened. But you can't do anything now, dear. Come in and I'll tell them to get you some tea."

Amelia laughed, looked down at the face on her shoulder, laid the head back on the bench among the drooping green of the creeper, stooped over it, kissed it and said quite quietly and gently "Good-bye, dear, good-bye!"—took Ernestine's arm and went away with her.

The doctor made an examination and gave a death-certificate "Heart failure," was his original and brilliant diagnosis. The certificate said nothing, and Frederick said nothing, of the creeper that was wound about the dead man's neck, nor of the little white wounds, like little bloodless lips half-open, that they found about the dead man's neck.

"An imaginative or uneducated person," said the doctor, "might suppose that the creeper had something to do with his death. But we mustn't encourage superstition. I will assist

my man to prepare the body for its last sleep. Then we need not have any chattering woman."

"Can you read Latin?" Frederick asked. The doctor could, and, later, did.

It was the Latin of that brown book with the Doricourt arms on it that Frederick wanted read. And when he and the doctor had been together with the book between them for three hours, they closed it, and looked at each other with shy and doubtful eyes.

"It can't be true," said Frederick.

"If it is," said the more cautious doctor, "you don't want it talked about. I should destroy that book if I were you. And I should root up that creeper and burn it. It is quite evident, from what you tell me, that your friend believed that this creeper was a man-eater, that it fed, just before its flowering time, as the book tells us, at dawn, and that he fully meant that the thing when it crawled into the pavilion seeking its prey should find you and not him. It would have been so, I understand, if his watch had not stopped at one o'clock."

"He dropped it, you know," said Doricourt like a man in a dream.

"All the cases in this book are the same," said the doctor, "the strangling, the white wounds I have heard of such plants, I never believed." He shuddered. "Had your friend any spite against you? Any reason for wanting to get you out of the way?"

Frederick thought of Ernestine, of Thesiger's eyes on Ernestine, of her smile at him over her blue muslin shoulder.

"No," he said, "none. None whatever. It must have been accident. I am sure he did not know. He could not read Latin." He lied, being, after all, a gentleman, and Ernestine's name being sacred.

"The creeper seems to have been brought here and planted in Henry the Eighth's time. And then the thing began. It seems to have been at its flowering season that it needed the . . . that, in short, it was dangerous. The little animals and birds found dead near the pavilion . . . But to move itself all that way, across the floor! The thing must have been almost conscious," he said with a sincere shudder. "One would think,"

he corrected himself at once, "that it knew what it was doing, if such a thing were not plainly contrary to the laws of nature "

"Yes," said Frederick, "one would I think if I can't do anything more I'll go and rest. Somehow all this has given me a turn Poor Thesiger!"

His last thought before he went to sleep was one of pity.

"Poor Thesiger," he said, "how violent and wicked! And what an escape for me! I must never tell Ernestine. And all the time there was Amelia. . . Ernestine would never have done *that for me*" And on a little pang of regret for the impossible he fell asleep

Amelia went on living. She was not the sort that dies even of such a thing as happened to her on that night, when for the first and last time she held her love in her arms and knew him for the murderer he was. It was only the other day that she died, a very old woman. Ernestine who, beloved and surrounded by children and grandchildren, survived her, spoke her epitaph

"Poor Amelia," she said, "nobody ever looked the same side of the road where she was. There was an indiscretion when she was young. Oh, nothing disgraceful, of course. She was a lady. But people talked. It was the sort of thing that stamps a girl, you know."

Edgar Pangborn

Pick-up for Olympus

This was Ab Thompson—you might have seen him if you were around there in the 1960s: thin nose, scant chin, hair sandy to gray, pop eyes, and a warm depth of passion for anything with wheels. If it had pistons, wheels, some kind of driving shaft, Ab could love it. When the old half-ton bumbled into his filling station, the four cylinders of his lonesome heart pounded to the spark, the best of many voices within him said tenderly: *Listen how she perks!* The bearded driver leaning from the cab had to ask him twice: “Is this the right road for Olympus?”

A genuine 1937 Chevvy, sweet as the day she was hatched. Oh—little things here and there, of course Ab pulled himself together “Never heard of it. You’re aimed for N’York—might be beyond there somewhere.” The muddy hood stirred his longing, when this thunder-buggy was made, streamlining wasn’t much more than the beginning of a notion. “Water? Check the oil, sir?”

“Yes, both. Got enough gas, I think.” The driver’s voice was fatigued, perhaps from the June heat. Ab Thompson raised the hood and explored. Rugged, rugged . . . “They don’t make ‘em like this nowadays.”

“I guess not.” In the back of the truck a drowsy-eyed woman in a loose gown of white linen scratched the head of a leopard and kept watch of half a dozen shy little goats.

Ab marveled it was like the dollar Ingersoll his pop used to brag about—and oh, dear Lord, how long ago was that? Before what they called the Second World War?—Ab couldn’t just remember. Naturally this old girl was beat up—beat up bad, and almost thirty years old. But she ticked away. She perked. Needed a new fan belt. Leak in the top of the radiator—dump in some ginger, maybe she’d seal herself up. And the valves. He showed the driver the spot of dirty oil on the measuring rod. “She’ll take a quart, maybe two.”

"All right," said the bearded man. The woman murmured reprovingly to the leopard and tied a short rope to the grass collar on his neck. When the oil was in, the driver said apologetically "Seems very noisy."

"That's your valves, Mister. I could tighten 'em some. You got one loose tappet, I dunno—I could tighten 'er some only not too much on account if I make her too tight you don't get the power is all."

"Well—" the driver scratched the thick curls tumbling over the horns on his forehead. "Well, suppose you—"

"She ain't had a real valve job in quite some time, am I right, Mister? I ain't equipped for a valve job is the hell of it. But I could look her over, give you an idea, won't cost you nothing, glad to do it. Understand, that there ticking don't hurt nothing, it's just your tappet, but them valves—" Ab spat in embarrassment.

"Yes, look her over I'd be much obliged."

"Kind of like a good watch, Mister—got to keep her cleaned up."

"Yes. Look her over, give me an idea."

Ab sighed in happiness "Okay. Twenty minutes, say . . ."

You could pound the daylights out of them, he thought—they'd still perk. Bet she could take a ten-percent grade in high, even now. Actually the valves weren't bad, he saw—sighing over the leaf-gauge, wishing in a brief sorrow like the touch of wings that somehow, somewhere, it might be possible to set up the right kind of shop. Suppose you could stretch the money as far as hiring an assistant—then maybe an addition on the south side, with room for a lift—nuts no use dreaming . . . The valves weren't bad—bit of maladjustment, natural after neglect. She'd perk. They never made them like this nowadays—

The woman in white was exercising the leopard on the rope, in the open space around the gas-tanks, a goat bleated peevishly.

Not that there was anything wrong with the new cars, Ab thought—especially the take-off jobs that needed only a twenty-foot clearance to sprout wings and leave the highway those might be hell-fired cute when they got a few more

bugs ironed out And you couldn't deny the new ground models were slick and pretty fifty miles to the gallon if you didn't average more than a hundred per But you take this old baby—"Mister," said Ab Thompson, "you got compression, I do mean Shouldn't have no trouble on the hills."

"That's true I have no trouble in the hills."

"Starter ain't too good Might've had some damage, I dunno "

"I meant to ask about that. The trouble is here in the cab"

"Huh? Nothin' there but the button you step on."

"I know My foot keeps catching on it." Ab opened the right-hand door, the button looked good enough "I thought, if you could build it out a little—?" The driver showed Ab the cloven bottom of his hoof. "This slot here—you see, the button catches in it"

"Oh, hell, instant plastic'll fix that." Ab trotted to his shack, delighted Nice to have the right stuff on hand for once. He returned with a gadget like a grease-gun. "This here is something new in the trade Hardens on contact with air, I do mean hardens Stick to anything—got to handle it careful till it's dry Comes out in a spray, like." He played the plastic delicately on the starter button, building it out away from the gas pedal. "Now try that, sir."

"Oh, fine Just what I had in mind. Well, the valves—"

"Ain't too bad But I would recommend you stop some place where they got the equipment. Might go on a long time, or—well, she might kind of start complaining, I dunno. It oughta be done "

"I'll see to it Much obliged" The woman and the leopard climbed back in the truck. "What do I owe you?"

Ab massaged his neck. "Three bucks . . . Thank you, sir. Come again" The little truck rolled away. "Jesus, I do mean! Thirty years old and she still perks, just as sweet as you-be-damn "

H. F. Heard

The Swap

"Let's try!"

"What nonsense!"

"Well, if it's nonsense, no harm's done by trying. Besides, it takes only a few minutes anyhow"

"It's too silly—all this Indian pretense."

"But it *isn't* Yoga, it's Sufi. And it's quite plain and experimental. If it doesn't work, we'll know it in five or ten minutes, that isn't much time to lose."

"And if it does?"

"Oh, you own it might!"

"I don't own anything—I mean, I don't allow anything. It's you who want to make this absurd experiment. All I ask is If such a grotesque thing should actually happen, does your mumbo-jumbo tell you how to un-mumbo-jumbo again?"

"Yes, all you have to do is to repeat the process from the other end, or side, and there you are, back again."

Jones, who was urging the experiment, was a large, enthusiastic man. He had asked Mather, a smaller, more accurate colleague, to come around. He was always asking Mather around. Mather usually came, usually punctured the blister of speculation which had risen in Jones's easily inflamed mind. They generally parted with the mutual feeling of having wasted time and the mutual, if not spoken, resolve not to meet again. But they did. Perhaps, in some odd way, they needed each other. More and more those we have thought to be enemies have, at least in natural history, proved to be widely reciprocating partners, those we took to be obvious parasites and victim-hosts, closer inspection has shown to be symbiots—partners who interchange essential services.

Mather was a fairly conservative psychologist. Jones held a newly invented chair of Historical Anthropology. The crank businessman who had founded their small college had in-

sisted that, among the standard conventional faculties, there should be this odd study. That he had chosen also to endow this professorship with one thousand dollars a year more than the endowment of any of the other chairs didn't make the position of Jones, his appointee, any easier.

But Jones was not the kind of man to care. His ebullient indifference to his conservative colleagues' envy-tinged disapproval he called "the anthropological outlook."

"We're all savages," he used to announce airily at the high table, "all, mentally, guinea pigs to be tested and studied, unless we're anthropologists." Then he would add what he called the anthropological approach "And, of course, the anthropologist himself is only a rarer form of savage than another anthropologist, and so on ad infinitum."

"Then you have no datum of objectivity," Wilkins, the philosopher, would challenge.

"Well, there can't be—unless you could really get inside someone else."

"That wouldn't be enough," cut in Mather. "It would, to be precise, be going only halfway. To complete the process and bring it to an adequate conclusion, from the premise you have postulated, you would have not only to get inside someone else, simultaneously he would have to get inside you. Then each would have to return and compare notes."

"Yes," said Jones agreeably, "yes, that, at last, would be real experimental anthropology."

His mind floated off in speculation. The rest of the high-table discussion fell to its normal level—the food presented, the football prospects, and the local gossip.

This contribution from Mather recurred to Jones, however, a fortnight later. It and Jones's own pachydermatous good nature and eupeptic hopefulness—his digestion was never his weak spot—quite prepared him for another snub. After all, the instructions actually seemed to point to Mather.

Jones, in pursuit of his odd assignment—for his colleagues had to own that he worked as hard at his silly job and with more enthusiasm than they did at their proper ones—had been reading up on Sufi esoteric practices. One in particular had interested him. It was called "How the rainbow which circles the spray of the Fountain of Light (The Nor) may, by

heart-contact, be thrown to link with another such rainbow" There followed quite unmistakable instructions as to how this rainbow interchange was to be effected.

"Well," Jones had remarked to himself as he had put the book down "If that means anything, it means that, with quite a simple experiment, one should be able to do precisely what Mather said (and quite rightly) would alone let one have real anthropological knowledge, direct knowledge, of another person "

He went on, with growing interest, to read the further instructions They said that for the best or easiest results "the opposite number should be one's contrast", if, for example, one was born under Jupiter with the sun in a neighboring "house," then one should choose as one's colleague in the experiment someone whose natal star was Saturn, with more than a glance of the Moon, or perhaps of Mercury, in his influences

"That certainly would seem to point out Mather His dryness would be a perfect complement to my ebullience," murmured Jones to himself, pencil in hand "I'll try Maybe the stars indicate our collusions as well as our collisions" Whether they do or not, the fact remains that Mather did come when called Jones opened with a really quite good "anthropological approach "

"I've been thinking over what you said about insight into character "

"You mean that if you are to be able to see into me I must be able to the same degree to see into you?"

"Yes, that's it, and, of course, you're right."

Mather was not so desiccated that he was not a little supplied by wholehearted agreement.

"I'm glad you think so," he conceded.

So, when Jones unmasked his request, he did not immediately refuse Jones's way of putting it, too, was not unskillful.

"I've come across a psychophysical experimental method which aims at helping such insight Of course, I'm not a psychologist, so I can't tell if there's anything in it. I thought perhaps you'd 'vet' it for me "

"A psychophysical method of insight—do you mean an

eye exercise?" Mather was permitting himself only a very low percentage of curiosity in his question, but Jones took it as a request for more information. And once again he improved his position.

"Well, I gather it is practically nothing but a physical method—something which can be definitely tested."

That certainly reassured Mather, who was one of the almost wholly physiological psychologists.

"Well, go ahead. Describe the method."

Jones knew that this would be the turning point. He tried to preserve the favorable position he had won. But in a few minutes it was clear that he had lost heavily. He could only conclude rather feebly, "Let's try."

And then, when he thought he had failed, there came that queer little hint of interest, if only nervous interest. Jones, like many florid optimistic men, was a diabetic and had been on insulin quite a while. Little upsets like this told on him more than he chose to own to himself. His nervousness was disguised—even to himself—rather than lessened by his outward cheerfulness. He began to feel his need of the routine shot. But if Mather was going to yield, he must be pushed now. Mather fidgeted, put his hand in his pocket, pulled it out empty, and then said, "Oh, very well, let's get it over and show there's nothing in it. After all, a great deal of science still consists in pricking the bubbles of superstition!" It was hardly a gracious offer to co-operate, but Jones was ready to take it.

"The first thing is what is called the heart-contact," he said. "We have to sit as close as we can, directly opposite one another."

He drew up two stools and sat down on one. Mather methodically settled himself on the other. This was the last time, he said to his not ill-tempered but conventionally respectable self, that he would humor Jones. Even if Jones had the ear of their silly old founder, if the rest of the faculty—which was sound enough—kept steadily at sound work, the college could build up a reputation which could make it independent.

Jones interrupted this not too friendly reflection with, "Would you please draw your stool as close as possible? The

THE SWAP

point is that we have to have the left breast as close as possible to the left breast It's to get the two hearts opposite one another"

"Two hearts that beat as one?" queried Mather crossly, but adjusting his position as asked

Jones answered only, "Now, please draw over a little to the left"—he did so, too—"so that our faces are as much as possible face to face And now we have to let each eye look into the eye it sees opposite it."

This, thought Mather, is worse than a bore—it's really rather unpleasant. Still, it would soon be over.

That was, as far as he could remember, his last actual reflection for a considerable time It wasn't that he ceased to notice things Indeed, he perceived things perhaps more clearly now than ever before Perhaps it was that he hadn't been so interested in anything, in a sort of vivid way, since he was a child Perhaps that was the reason he'd ceased to be able to reflect, ceased to be the detached little man with the notebook.

Jones found exactly the same thing Perhaps he noticed it a few seconds earlier than Mather did, since he wasn't delayed by having to get over an attack of irritation Things had suddenly gone just as he wished, so his observations followed quite a simple route, and at a steady pace First, he saw the bridge of his own nose reflected in Mather's eyes It was like looking into a small, very clear, binocular camera—a sort of stereoscopic effect He was just beginning to wonder why he had never tried this odd little experiment before, when he was disturbed by an awkward feeling—a physical feeling that he hadn't had since he'd fainted from a palpitation His heart had begun to beat as if it were pushing itself out of his chest, and he had at the same time the sensation that this was in some way a "double event"—that Mather was suffering in the same way and that he, Jones, could directly share that unpleasantness as though it were his own He tried to shift his attention back to his eyes and away from his chest He was sufficiently successful, though the acute discomfort continued, to be largely distracted by what he saw

A moment before he had been observing the bridge of

his nose mirrored in the eyes which were staring into his. Now the same field of vision was before him—but not quite the same—the same details, but their order was changed. He saw his nose and, behind it, the mirror eyes—and in these what was he seeing? To clear away his confusion he lowered his focus. He saw quite clearly his own nose confronting him. He saw the broad bridge, almost a saddle, which he'd so often confronted when shaving. Squinting involuntarily, he caught sight of a high narrow bridge even closer to him. It stuck out so far and high that he could see the white, stretched skin that covered it.

Funny, he thought, I imagined I was much too far-sighted to be able to focus on anything as close as that, or, for that matter, on that nose opposite.

Suddenly, he was overcome by vertigo. What was his actual position? outlook? orientation? There wasn't any doubt. It was only fear that was making him try to question it. A blast of sheer dread struck him like a line squall. Here was real nightmare. He'd never imagined a dream as simple as this could so stun him with panic. He *must* wake up. What roused him, however, was a laugh—not a very pleasant one—but he had to own that it wasn't sinister, only ugly, and so, in a way, reassuring. Where had he heard that queer neighing cackle? Of course it was a rather clever but quite offensive parody of his own cheerful "ha, ha."

The face close before him began to draw away. But the laughter went on; Jones could see as well as hear that now. The laughter was obviously coming from the face that was now drawn away sufficiently to be seen as a whole. There was no longer a shadow of a doubt under which to take shelter. He had to come out into the hard light of knowledge. He could see himself laughing, and that unpleasant neighing must be—if not the sound of his voice, at least what it sounded like—to whom? To Mather, of course! The mouth opposite him ceased to gape and bellow. It was about to form words. The accent of the voice was little more pleasant than its laughter.

"Well, we've done it." Jones heard the remark, a mincing parody of his own (as he'd always thought) rather clear-cut tenor. Yes, there sitting opposite him was—himself. Not quite himself, though. He knew himself, as far as ap-

pearances went, only through those daily mirror inspections when he shaved and brushed his hair. Now, of necessity, he saw himself the other way around, the right way around. It was depressing to notice the significant, if slight, differences that showed up. He had gotten used to making little compensatory disregardings of the familiar mirror presentation. For instance, he now saw that his features were not at all the symmetrical pattern he'd come to assume: one eye was distinctly lower than the other, his nose was clearly out of line, his mouth had a pouched fold on one corner and a tucked-in wrinkle in the other, the left ear stood out much further than the right. So that was the actual impression one gave. That was what one looked like when one stood outside oneself and, disembodied, looked with detachment at one's body.

The words "detachment" and "disembodied," however, running rapidly through his mind, suddenly swung him around. Of course, he wasn't detached, disembodied. There was something worse than just seeing oneself from the outside, worse than having simply dragged one's moorings: there was the actual position from which one saw that one had drifted. There was the shock of what one had run into—of being right in someone else's body. The mouth was, naturally, dry from alarm. But was that the only reason why it tasted so unpleasantly strange and stale? The tongue obeyed him as he passed it around the "tacky" gums. But in its routine efforts to freshen things up, it struck against something that caught and pinched it. What was that? Of course, it must be a large upper dental plate. What a horrid thing! Thank heaven, he had kept his own teeth—all but a little bridgework—"the bridge of sighs," he called it jokingly to himself, for sometimes he could hear his breath whistle through it. But, of course, that was just what he hadn't done. He'd lost his own carefully tended body and was now shut up in this dilapidated makeshift. He swallowed with fear—fear of having to make an inventory that might disclose heaven-knew-what lapses, lesions, and disgusts. The swallow was not a success. Hell! had one to learn how someone else does everything? He began to cough. Swollen tonsils had given him that choke Mather had evidently never taken.

proper care of his body He began to sneeze The nose was apparently as neglected as the throat He snatched for a handkerchief. It was certainly in keeping with all the rest But there was no choice.

Shaken by the sneezing, that confounded huge dental plate nearly flew out of his mouth He was so disgustedly vexed that he almost let it slip out. He felt he wanted to stamp on it to express his revulsion. The thought that there was someone to protest against brought him to his outer senses again. Yes, there he was—his real self, sitting in front of him He could no longer see his old body—dear, delightful, most precious of all objects—clearly, for it had retreated The stool on which it was still seated was now pushed back still farther. Of course, he couldn't see as clearly as he was used to seeing. He remembered that Mather, like most pettifogging, hairsplitting, over-accurate persons, was nearsighted. His own body, it was clear, however, wasn't being pushed about yet That was a relief Mather—after that first explosion of startled humor—must have been even more stunned than he was by what had happened.

Well, he, Jones, must pull himself together—or, rather, this old rag bag Mather had left to him. He must hurry For he suddenly realized that Mather must be told how to take care of the Jones body. He might, by some sudden, careless, foolish action, strain or break part of that body—clumsy little ass

Jones got to his feet—but not very skillfully. As he discovered when he tried to bend it quickly, the left knee was stiff, indeed, quite arthritic, and judging by the feel, there were some quite savage corns on the right toes But the body was lighter and he was nearer the floor when he stood up Of course, Mather was a smaller man by some inches He stepped over to where his own body was seated. It looked up at him with a queer, stiff twist of the neck.

"Shall I give you a hand up?" Jones-in-Mather asked Mather-in-Jones

"No," came that queer voice in reply. "It's a damned clumsy overgrown thing you've swapped on me But I'd better learn to ride it myself."

"Well, it's better than being cramped up as I am!"

"Don't make personal remarks," the other one snapped. "This body seems pretty well out of condition "

"You take care of it," exclaimed Jones "You're very careless, I'm finding out, about how to take care of a body. And that body you're in, just because it is a fine one, needs care "

"Oh, damn you," began Mather Then they both broke into feeble laughter

"Well," Jones remarked finally, "we've got a double hold on each other, there's no doubt We'd better each set about quietly finding out how to run these machines "

They were silent for some time, as each returned to his internal inventory While doing this Jones, though, watched Mather He saw Mather move the Jones hand up to the Jones face and feel and pat it gingerly Why should he do that? There was nothing to be ashamed of or disgusted at in that fine ruddy cheek. Suddenly the Jones voice addressed him "You take care of that plate You haven't got one. Don't you lose it "

Jones felt he must retaliate for this insult, the gross insult of being told to take care—as though it were precious—of a contraption which was a disgusting injury to have stuffed in one's mouth. He was seized with a craving to spit the beastly thing out. Wiser second thoughts prevailed. He contented himself with retaliating "You take care of that left eye Those eyes see twice as far as yours do, but the left one needs care—don't go straining it."

"It's half blind," said Mather, turning the Jones-head down, raising the Jones-wrist, and looking at the wrist watch. "I can hardly see the watch hands!"

"You've never been able to see across the room. Look at those books in the bookcase over there "

Jones saw Mather turn the Jones-head toward the books and become interested.

"Yes," came the grudging acknowledgment. "It's queer to see as far as that with the naked eye."

"And now look out of the window "

Mather ambled the big Jones-body across the room

"I feel a bit as though I were on stilts," he giggled as he passed his own body. Then, at the window, he added. "It

is rather fun with these long-distance eyes of yours Spectacles don't quite give all that."

For a few minutes they walked about, each trying out his borrowed surface senses. Jones was quite amused to see what amazing detail he could now see on the dial of his watch. Then he scanned the back of the hairy Mather-hand that had risen up and held itself in front of these new, shortly keen eyes which were now his, as though that hand had obeyed him all his life.

Next, he turned to trying out the ears. They were certainly different—not any sharper, he thought, but more inclined to relish sound just for itself. He remembered that Mather, of course, played the piano. He wondered what it would be like to play? Would one really have to care for music? Or would the fingers simply run away of themselves, up and down the keyboard, as quickly and as mechanically as one of those old Pianolas?

His interior investigations were disturbed by hearing his former body speak. Mather was complaining in that voice which he, Jones, was still certain that Mather was putting on to make him hear how ridiculous he sounded. Mather, too, was quiggling, in a ridiculous way, his borrowed hands.

"Why, they're nearly paralyzed," he squeaked.

"Don't be insulting."

"Well, don't make my voice sound so absurd. You've been doing that to insult me!" answered Mather.

So, Jones reflected, we sound equally ridiculous to each other. This mollified him considerably and he replied soothingly "It's because you can play and I can't. It's amusing, this end, to feel a hand as live as that."

Mather, too, was soothed, and a new sensation distracted Jones something sharp that shot right up the inner side of his leg. He twisted the leg again, and again that pain shot, keen as toothache. Heavens, he thought, so that's sciatica.

The two figures walked up and down the big open study. An onlooker would have thought they were two philosophers lost in reflection over some shared intellectual problem. In truth, they were both engrossed in nothing but feeling. Each was wandering up and down the strange lodging in which he found himself, trying the doors, the odd cupboards, the back

rooms, looking down mysterious ill-lit passages, listening in at private telephones, peering out from mysterious windows It was like moving through a strange house at dusk and every now and then tripping over wires which gave you a shock, switched on a light, or rang a bell

After a silence, Jones heard Mather muttering again in that provoking Jones-parody voice

"It's a clumsy body," the voice said

"Nonsense," he retorted "It's simply because you don't know how to run a high-powered car Don't you go flinging it about It's a bigger thing than you're used to "

"Well, you take care of mine You're not used to as fine a piece of mechanism."

A sudden gust of anger swept through Jones He felt a strong temptation to pinch one of these highly prized fingers in the door—only then he, Jones, would have to endure all the pain

Well, it was no use wrangling Mather was so stupid as only to be vexed by this predicament, but he, Jones, should surely be interested in such a brilliant success He was determined that he would be—though perhaps it was rather more of an adventure than he had been able to foresee But, before going any further, there was a lot of interest to be gained from learning at firsthand—and indeed more than *firsthand*—about another body's little ways This was real exploration, going further, after all, than any human exploration had ever gone And, once you got over your disgust, the actual way of exploring was rather fun It was a little like being out on the road for the first time on a sort of mysterious bicycle which completely enclosed you, but which you had to balance and drive every moment The machine gave queer little swoops and dives In another way it was like being moved into a new house with a new set of servants The things one used to require were still supplied, but were never to be found in quite the same places the old staff in the old house used to put them This Mather-body had a number of odd tricks For instance, you had to know when it really wanted to sneeze and play other pneumatic tricks, and when it was only shamming—or, at least, not intending to go through with the thing You'd get all ready,

standing by with a pocket handkerchief out, and, then, on the brink, the body would change its mind

Suddenly, as Jones was congratulating himself on how well he was tumbling to its ways and getting its drift, it put up a new problem to him. It was a sort of itch, or perhaps craving would be a better word. Did it want food? No, there was certainly the remains of a meal in its stomach. A drink? No; the throat wasn't wanting liquid, that was clear. And yet the throat or mouth was wanting something. Jones was so puzzled that he glanced over to the Mather-possessed body. He saw Mather pull up the Jones-hand and put it into the pocket of the Jones-coat. Now, that was going too far! Swap bodies, maybe, but you must respect personal property. Next, Mather would be reading his private correspondence. In a sort of retaliation, Jones stuck one of the queer effeminate hands—which were all he had now to rely on—into Mather's pocket. It surprised him. It was hardly in before it closed on something and drew it out. A pipe! Of course, Mather smoked and he, Jones, did not. That queer craving must be for tobacco. He looked across and saw that his body had ceased to rummage in his pockets. Again there came that parody-laugh to which he couldn't get used.

"Of course," Mather was saying to him, "of course, it's my body that wants to smoke, though, for a moment, I was absent-mindedly rummaging for my pipe, as I knew it was time for one."

By that time Jones had found that his borrowed, burrowing fingers had lit on a tobacco pouch.

"You'd better have a smoke for me," cackled the parody-voice. "Then I'll not be feeling nicotine starved when I get back."

Fancy, thought Jones, having to stoke this beastly little body in the filthy way just to keep it comfortable for its tobacco-addicted owner.

But the demand was in him now. It was he who now felt the wish to smoke. But how? He'd never smoked in his life; had always hated the silly, dirty habit. His own body drew across to him and, through it, Mather said, "Here,

give me the pipe and pouch" But after some fumbling Mather exclaimed

"Damn these chilblained fingers! They can't even pack a pipe!"

Jones had begun to want so much to smoke that he swallowed the insult. Together, they managed to get the pipe filled.

"Now, don't burn my suit or my fingers," was Mather's last provoking advice. But as soon as he was sucking at the pipe a sense of ease and tolerance rose up in Jones's mind. He felt it was ridiculous, but there it was and, as it was pleasant, why not yield to it? Jones sat down. At least, until this pipe was finished, there was no need to do anything else. After all, it was the only pipe he would ever enjoy in his life. He knew, once back in his proper body, he would hate the beastly thing. He stretched himself back in a chair and noticed idly that, as he himself had become relaxed, Mather, in the Jones body, seemed to be becoming proportionately restless. After fidgeting about increasingly, he turned at last on Jones.

"Jones," he called, "is there anything wrong with this body of yours? I'm beginning to feel queer, devilish queer. You didn't eat something at lunch which disagreed with you, and then slip out and sit smoking comfortably in my body while I have to do the digesting?"

He was obviously in angry distress which was evidently growing, so Jones hastened to reassure him, at least on that count.

"No, no," he answered in quite a placatory tone—or, at least, in one that was as mollifying as he could make Mather's sharp little voice manage. "No, I assure you I didn't. Never do I eat very sparingly. In fact, I'm on a moderate diet."

As he said that, the thought, the explanation, flashed into his mind. Lord! How forgetful one becomes away from home! He put down the pipe he was now holding quite expertly and rose in real concern. He fumbled, found Mather's watch, and looked at it. Yes, it was true enough: it was full time—a bit over, in point of fact. He went over to his Mather-occupied body or, rather, the body that was now wholly occupying—engrossing Mather.

"It'll be all right in a minute I'll show you what to do"

Mather only looked at him with dumb distress in his Jones-eyes. Then the mouth muttered weakly. "Can't you get me out of this?" He was too tired, evidently, even to protest.

"Yes, yes," said Jones reassuringly. "In a moment, in just a moment we'll change back. But just now—" He paused. The truth was that he was frightened, too—more frightened, maybe, than Mather was. For Mather didn't know what was wrong with him what was giving out under him Jones did. He didn't dare risk the change-over—with all that almost suffocating acceleration of the heart—when his body, with Mather inside it, might collapse before he was back in it and able to do what he knew must be done. What a fool he'd been not to keep an eye on the time. Of course, being out of his body he wouldn't have the warning sensation and, equally of course, Mather wouldn't know what those first symptoms would be signaling.

Well, somehow he must face Mather and get him to do what had to be done. Otherwise there were only two other facts to be faced. Which of them would be the worse, he couldn't imagine. One was Mather's dying of the body Mather was now in, falling down and falling to pieces, and Mather's going—going, literally, only heaven knew where—and he, Jones, living, spending the rest of his life in this absurd little spidery body—already more than half a dozen years older than he was; and—horrors!—having to take up life in Mather's house—in Mather's body, it would be the only place he would be allowed to live. To have to share the house with wizened, frisky little Mrs. Mather—he who was unmarried and a misogynist—and those awful, noisy, impudent, dirty children.

There was, of course, the one other choice to be certified as a lunatic by maintaining the truth that he was Jones in Mather's body and that Mather had died in Jones's

The thought roused him to desperation. He seized his own body by the arm. How odd to feel one's body from the outside! But there was no more time for such reflections.

"Come," he said hurriedly. "Lean on me if you feel you're going to faint."

Somehow he got that huge, heeling bulk across the passage and up the three stairs into the bathroom. He snatched the hypodermic from the small mirror cabinet. He slumped the Jones body down on the seat, then propped it up and set about loading the syringe. But, heavens!, these neat little hands, which could deftly fill a pipe and run freely enough on the piano keyboard, now fumbled almost as though they were frostbitten. Once, he nearly dropped the little glass tube of the cylinder on the floor tiles. Then his inept fingers pulled the plunger out too far, and it came clean away from the tube. But at last, by dint of sheer schooling, he got those incompetent hands to carry the loaded instrument at the ready. He pushed back the sleeve on his old body's forearm. Mather was roused by this.

"What the devil are you doing?" he whispered in helpless anger.

"You'll be all right in a moment," replied Jones. But would he? Anyhow, it was clear that a moment or two would decide, one way or the other, and, probably, for good. He pinched up the skin of the left forearm. He'd so often, quickly and deftly, plucked up the flesh on his leg in that way. But these wretched Mather-fingers fell down on that, too. At last he had a good fold fairly well held with the left hand. He brought the needle near with his right. Of course, it caught badly in the skin—wouldn't make a good piercing. He pressed the plunger feebly. The liquid began to ooze out over the skin. He jabbed savagely. Mather stirred in the collapsed body and just succeeded in making it say, "So, you're finishing me off with a shot of poison. That's why." His voice trailed away.

But the needle had gone in with a tear—right in—too deep, really, but what did he care?—it was in. That was all that mattered now. He drove the plunger home and saw the skin swell above the buried slant of the hollow needle. He whipped it out, stuck a patch of cotton on the puncture, and waited, bent over the body—his body, which he must bring back. Gradually it stirred, though the eyes were now closed. He shuffled the hypodermic behind the bathroom seat. Yes, the body was coming alive. So great was his relief that he dragged the hulk on his shoulder, drew it out of the

bathroom back into the sitting-room, and plumped it into a chair. As the body sank back, he heard Mather saying in a vague, accentless voice, "What went wrong? What's wrong with this damned body anyway?"

Jones's mind was working quickly now. He dragged a stool forward to the right side of the chair in which his body sat, held up by the chair's straight back. He pushed himself forward in Mather's body, until the two bodies were left-breast to left-breast. He could actually feel the dull labored thump of the Jones heart like a slow bass scored under the hard, thick stroke of the Mather-heart, which had had some pretty stiff pumping to do in the last ten minutes. He swung the Mather-face close to his old face. The lids were still lowered.

"Mather!" he said. "Look at me!"

The eyes opened and gazed steadily, absent-mindedly, as a baby will stare when absorbed in taking its bottle. That would do. Jones gazed out through the very short-ranged Mather-eyes into the two pupils opposite him. He felt his heart begin to quieten: slower and slower it beat. He felt relaxed and easy. Then he felt his heart rise in its beats again—not distressingly but with a series of rapid, strong strokes. And then, once again, it began to smooth out its emphasis and become as steady as before. He rested back comfortably. The face opposite him drew away. He was able to look past it and idly read the titles on the book backs across the room.

Suddenly Mather's voice broke on his ear: "It's not a safe method. But I own it's the quickest I've ever come across for hypnosis."

Jones sat up.

"It put you under deeper than it put me. You're hardly around yet," Mather's voice continued, "but one would expect that. A trained psychologist is always the most difficult of all people to put under."

Jones got to his feet. Yes, they were his own familiar, comfortable, cornless feet. "Well," he remarked, "thank you for trying it out with me."

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said Mather airily. "But, take my advice, and leave such experimenting to trained psycholo-

gists I don't mind telling you that you're looking pretty queer" He paused Then he went on, with a note of grudging curiosity coming into his voice "I may as well tell you that when I was a student I was hypnotized a number of times, for experimental purposes But I don't remember ever having had any dreams at all like those I had during our little experiment Did you have any queer fancies?"

Jones gave a non-committal grunt Mather stood for a moment, uncertain whether or not to probe further Finally he said to himself, It must have been the Freudian "transference" working in dream-imagery form But, I must say, I never expected the feeling-provoked fantasy could be so convincing It is certainly not safe Certainly not.

He walked to the door "Well, good-by; and you'll take my advice, won't you? No more experimenting of this sort" Jones shook hands with him and got rid of him with another series of thanks

When he returned from letting the little man out, he stood for a moment, still and silent in the middle of the room Then he remarked to himself in a soft voice "Maybe he is right. Really, it could only have been a dream" But, after another moment, he turned, went out of the room, through the passage, and into the bathroom He bent down Behind the bathroom seat lay the hypodermic syringe He pulled up his left sleeve On the lower forearm was a big, clumsy puncture with a small scrap of reddened cotton still adhering to it He looked at his watch.

"Well," he muttered, "if it *was* a dream, it not only took its time about it, but it troubled to produce quite a lot of circumstantial evidence It was certainly a dream that cared enough for verisimilitude to dress the part It was a dream with such a sense of the dramatic that it first nearly pushed me right out of the basic dream of this life, but, having taken me to the brink, it swung me back again I've never heard of a patient who overslept the time of his injection long enough to bring himself to the verge of collapse and then, in his dream, not only sleepwalked and gave himself the dose in the nick of time, but who also troubled to invent another character, taken from one of his colleagues And this character is brought in not only to give him the dose but,

with a novelist's love for accuracy of character, the colleague is made to give the injection so damn badly that the dreamer deals himself a sore arm for two weeks! Anyhow, that's what I'm in for!"

He paused and then went on to himself "But it'll be more than two weeks before I'll be able to decide if that was a dream or really a switch-over for a while If it really was, if one actually saw from the other side, well, then it was worth the discomfort and the risk But there's the rub one never *will* be quite sure—at least, till one has gone to the other side for good—and then it'll be too late to make a report of the sort that any of my colleagues would even listen to However, I suppose Mather is right· whether it was hypnosis or a real transference, one shouldn't try it again But if only I wasn't a diabetic, I think I'd have another try!"

Ray Bradbury

The Tombling Day

It was the Tombling day, and all the people had walked up the summer road, including Grandma Loblilly, and they stood now in the green day and the high sky country of Missouri, and there was a smell of the seasons changing and the grass breaking out in flowers

"Here we are," said Grandma Loblilly, over her cane, and she gave them all a flashing look of her yellow-brown eyes and spat into the dust.

The graveyard lay on the side of a quiet hill. It was a place of sunken mounds and wooden markers, bees hummed all about in quietudes of sound and butterflies withered and blossomed on the clear blue air. The tall sunburnt men and ginghammed women stood a long silent time looking in at their deep and buried relatives.

"Well, let's get to work!" said Grandma, and she hobbled across the moist grass, sticking it rapidly, here and there, with her cane.

The others brought the spades and special crates, with daisies and lilacs tied brightly to them. The government was cutting a road through here in August and since this graveyard had gone-unused in fifty years the relatives had agreed to untuck all the old bones and pat them snug somewhere else.

Grandma Loblilly got right down on her knees and trembled a spade in her hand. The others were busy at their own places.

"Grandma," said Joseph Pikes, making a big shadow on her working. "Grandma, you shouldn't be workin' on this place. This's William Simmons' grave, Grandma."

At the sound of his voice, everyone stopped working, and listened, and there was just the sound of butterflies on the cool afternoon air.

Grandma looked up at Pikes. "You think I don't know

it's *his* place? I ain't seen William Simmons in sixty years, but I intend to visit him today" She patted out trowel after trowel of rich soil and she grew quiet and introspective and said things to the day and those who might listen "Sixty years ago, and him a fine man, only twenty-three And me, I was twenty and all golden about the head and all milk in my arms and neck and persimmon in my cheeks Sixty years and a planned marriage and then a sickness and him dying away. And me alone, and I remember how the earth-mound over him sank in the rains—"

Everybody stared at Grandma.

"But still, Grandma—" said Joseph Pikes.

The grave was shallow She soon reached the long iron box.

"Gimme a hand!" she cried.

Nine men helped lift the iron box out of the earth, Grandma poking at them with her cane "Careful!" she shouted "Easy!" she cried "Now." They set it on the ground. "Now," she said, "if you be so kindly, you gentlemen might fetch Mr. Simmons on up to my house for a spell "

"We're takin' him on to the new cemetery," said Joseph Pikes

Grandma fixed him with her needle eye. "You just trot that box right up to my house Much obliged "

The men watched her dwindle down the road They looked at the box, looked at each other, and then spat on their hands.

Five minutes later the men squeezed the iron coffin through the front door of Grandma's little white house and set the box down by the pot-belly stove.

She gave them a drink all around "Now, let's lift the lid," she said "It ain't every day you see old friends "

The men did not move

"Well, if you won't, I will." She thrust at the lid with her cane, again and again, breaking away the earth-crust Spiders went touching over the floor There was a rich smell, like plowed spring earth Now the men fingered the lid Grandma stood back. "Up!" she said She gestured

her cane, like an ancient goddess And up in the air went
the lid The men set it on the floor and turned

There was a sound like wind sighing in October, from all
their mouths

There lay William Simmons as the dust filtered bright
and golden through the air There he slept, a little smile on
his lips, hands folded, all dressed up and no place in all
the world to go

Grandma Loblilly gave a low moaning cry.

"He's all there!"

There he was, indeed Intact as a beetle in his shell, his
skin all fine and white, his small eyelids over his pretty eyes
like flower petals put there, his lips still with color to them,
his hair combed neat, his tie tied, his fingernails pared clean
All in all, he was as complete as the day they shoveled the
earth upon his silent case

Grandma stood tightening her eyes, her hands up to catch
the breath that moved from her mouth. She couldn't see
"Where's my specs?" she cried People searched "Can't you
find 'em?" she shouted She squinted at the body "Never
mind," she said, getting close The room settled She sighed
and quavered and cooed over the opened box

"He's kept," said one of the women "He ain't crumbled "

"Things like that," said Joseph Pikes, "don't happen "

"It *happened*," said the woman

"Sixty years underground Stands to reason no man lasts
that long"

The sunlight was late by each window, the last butterflies
were settling amongst flowers to look like nothing more
than other flowers

Grandma Loblilly put out her wrinkly hand, trembling
"The earth kept him The way the air is That was good
dry soil for keeping "

"He's young," wailed one of the women, quietly "So
young "

"Yes," said Grandma Loblilly, looking at him "Him,
lying there, twenty-three years old And me, standing here,
pushing eighty!" She shut her eyes

"Now, Grandma," Joseph Pikes touched her shoulder.

"Yes, him lyin' there, all twenty-three and fine and purty, and *me*—" She squeezed her eyes tight. "Me bending over him, never young again, myself, only old and spindly, never to have a chance at being young agin. Oh, Lord! Death keeps people young. Look how kind death's been to him" She ran her hands over her body and face slowly, turning to the others "Death's nicer than life. Why didn't I die then, too? Then we'd both be young now, together. Me in my box, in my white wedding gown all lace, and my eyes closed down, all shy with death. And my hands making a prayer on my bosom"

"Grandma, don't carry on."

"I got a right to carry on! Why didn't I die, too? Then, when he came back like he came today, to see me, I wouldn't be like *this*!"

Her hands went wildly to feel her lined face, to twist the loose skin, to fumble the empty mouth, to yank the gray hair and look at it with appalled eyes.

"What a fine coming-back he's had!" She showed her skinny arms "Think that a man of twenty-three years will want the likes of a seventy-nine-year woman with sump-rot in her veins? I been cheated! Death kept him young forever. Look at me, did *Life* do so much?"

"They're compensations," said Joseph Pikes. "He ain't young, Grandma. He's long over eighty years."

"You're a fool, Joseph Pikes. He's fine as a stone, not touched by a thousand rains. And he's come back to see me and he'll be picking one of the younger girls now. What would he want with an old woman?"

"He's in no way to fetch nuthin' offa nobody," said Joseph Pikes

Grandma pushed him back. "Get out now, all of you! Ain't your box, ain't your lid, and it ain't your almost-husband! You leave the box here, leastwise tonight, and tomorrow you dig a new burying place!"

"Awright, Grandma; he was your beau. I'll come early tomorrow. Don't you cry, now."

"I'll do what my eyes most need to do"

She stood stiff in the middle of the room until the last of them were out the door. After a while she got a candle

and lit it and she noticed someone standing on the hill outside It was Joseph Pikes He'd be there the rest of the night, she reckoned, and she did not shout for him to go away She did not look out the window again, but she knew he was there, and so was much better rested in the following hours.

She went to the coffin and looked down at William Simmons

She gazed fully upon him Seeing his hands was like seeing actions She saw how they had been with reins of a horse in them, moving up and down She remembered how the lips of him had clucked as the carriage had glided along with an even pacing of the horse through the meadowlands, the moonlit shadows all around She knew how it was when those hands held to you.

She touched his suit. "That's not the same suit he was buried in!" she cried suddenly And yet she knew it was the same Sixty years had changed not the suit but the linings of her mind

Seized with a quick fear, she hunted a long time until she found her spectacles and put them on.

"Why, that's not William Simmons!" she shouted.

But she knew this also to be untrue It was William Simmons "His chin didn't go back *that* far!" she cried softly, logically "Or *did* it?" And his hair, "It was a wonderful sorrel color, I remember! This hair here's just plain brown. And his nose, I don't recall it being *that* tippy!"

She stood over this strange man and, gradually, as she watched, she knew that this indeed was William Simmons She knew a thing she should have known all along that dead people are like wax memory—you take them in your mind, you shape and squeeze and fix them, push a bump here, stretch one out there, pull the body tall, shape and reshape, handle, sculp and finish a man-memory until he's all out of kilter.

There was a certain sense of loss and bewilderment in her She wished she had never opened the box. Or, leastwise, had the sense to leave her glasses off She had not seen him clearly at first, just enough so she filled in the rough spots with her mind. Now, with her glasses on . . .

She glanced again and again at his face. It became slowly familiar. That memory of him that she had torn apart and put together for sixty years faded to be replaced by the man she had *really* known. And he was *fine* to look upon. The sense of having lost something vanished. He was the same man, no more, no less. This was always the way when you didn't see people for years and they came back to say howdy-do. For a spell you felt so very uneasy with them. But then, at last, you relaxed.

"Yes, that's you," she laughed. "I see you peeking out from behind all the strangeness. I see you all glinty and sly here and there and about."

She began to cry again. If only she could lie to herself, if only she could say, "Look at him, he don't look the same, he's not the same man I took a fetching on!" then she could feel better. But all the little inside-people sitting around in her head would rock back in their tiny rockers and cackle and say, "You ain't foolin' us none, Grandma."

Yes, how easy to deny it was him. And feel better. But she didn't deny it. She felt the great depressing sadness because here he was, young as creek water, and here she was, old as the sea.

"William Simmons!" she cried. "Don't look at me! I know you still love me, so I'll primp myself up!"

She stirred the stove-fire, quickly put irons on to heat, used irons on her hair till it was all grey curls. Baking-powder whitened her cheeks! She bit a cherry to color her lips, pinched her cheeks to bring a flush. From a trunk she yanked old materials until she found a faded blue velvet dress which she put on.

She stared wildly in the mirror at herself.

"No, no!" She groaned and shut her eyes. "There's nothing I can do to make me younger'n you, William Simmons! Even if I died now it wouldn't cure me of this old thing come on me, this disease of age!"

She had a violent wish to run forever in the woods, fall in a leaf-pile and molder down into smoking ruin with them. She ran across the room, intending never to come back. But as she yanked the door wide a cold wind exploded over her from outside and she heard a sound that made her hesitate.

The wind rushed about the room, yanked at the coffin and pushed inside it.

William Simmons seemed to stir in his box.

Grandma slammed the door

She moved slowly back to squint at him.

He was ten years older

There were wrinkles and lines on his hands and face
"William Simmons!"

During the next hour, William Simmons' face tolled away the years His cheeks went in on themselves, like clenching a fist, like withering an apple in a bin His flesh was made of carved pure white snow, and the cabin heat melted it. It got a charred look. The air made the eyes and mouth pucker. Then, as if struck a hammer-blow, the face shattered into a million wrinkles The body squirmed in an agony of time It was forty, then fifty, then sixty years old! It was seventy, eighty, one hundred years! Burning, burning away! There were small whispers and leaf-crackles from its face and its age-burning hands, one hundred ten, one hundred twenty years, line upon etched, greaved, line!

Grandma Loblilly stood there all the cold night, aching her bird-bones, watching, cold, over the changing man She was a witness to all improbabilities She felt something finally let loose of her heart. She did not feel sad any more The weight lifted away from her

She went peacefully to sleep, standing against a chair.

Sunlight came yellow through the woodland, birds and ants and creek waters were moving, each as quiet as the other, going somewhere.

It was morning

Grandma woke and looked down upon William Simmons.

He was nothing but delicate ivory carvings

"Ah," said Grandma, looking and seeing

Her very breath stirred and stirred his bones until they flaked, like a chrysalis, like a kind of candy all whittling away, burning with an invisible fire The bones flaked and flew, light as pieces of dust on the sunlight. Each time she shouted, the bones split asunder, there was a dry flaking rustle from the box.

If there was a wind and she opened the door, he'd be blown away on it like so many crackly leaves!

She bent for a long time, looking at the box. Then she gave a knowing cry, a sound of discovery and moved back, putting her hands first to her face and then to her spindly breasts and then traveling all up and down her arms and legs and fumbling at her empty mouth.

Her shout brought Joseph Pikes running

He pulled up at the door only in time to see Grandma Loblilly dancing and jumping around on her yellow, high-peg shoes in a wild gyration

She clapped hands, laughed, flung her skirts, ran in a circle, and did a little waltz with herself, tears on her face. And to the sunlight and the flashing image of herself in the wall mirror she cried

"I'm young! I'm eighty, but I'm younger'n *him!*"

She skipped, she hopped, and she curtsied

"There are compensations, Joseph Pikes, you was right!" she chortled "I'm younger'n *all* the dead ones in the whole world!"

And she waltzed so violently the whirl of her dress pulled at the box and whispers of chrysalis leapt on the air to hang golden and powdery amidst her shouts.

"Whee-deee!" she cried "Whee-heee!"

Minuke

The estate agent kept an uncomfortable silence until we reached his car "Frankly, I wish you hadn't got wind of that," he said "Don't know how you did I thought I had the whole thing carefully disposed of Oh, please get in"

He pulled his door shut and frowned "It puts me in a rather awkward spot I suppose I'd better tell you all I know about that case, or you'd be suspecting me of heaven knows what kinds of chicanery in your own."

As we set off to see the property I was interested in, he shifted the cigarette to the side of his mouth

"It's quite a distance, so I can tell you on the way there," he said. "We'll pass the very spot, as a matter of fact, and you can see it for yourself Such as there is to see"

It was away back before the war (said the estate agent). At the height of the building boom You remember how it was ribbon development in full blast everywhere, speculative builders sticking things up almost overnight. Though at least you could get a house when you wanted it in those days

I've always been careful in what I handle—I want you to understand that Then one day I was handed a packet of coast-road bungalows, for letting Put up by one of these gone tomorrow firms, and bought by a local man I can't say I exactly jumped for joy, but for once the things looked all right, and—business is inclined to be business

The desirable residence you heard about stood at the end of the row Actually, it seemed to have the best site On a sort of natural platform, as it were, raised above road-level and looking straight out over the sea Like all the rest, it had a simple two-bedroom, lounge, living-room, kitchen, bathroom layout. Red-tiled roof, roughcast walls Ornamental portico, garden-strip all round Sufficiently far from town, but with all conveniences

It was taken by a man named Pritchard Cinema projectionist, I think he was wife, a boy of ten or so, and a rather younger daughter Oh—and dog, one of those black, lop-eared animals They christened the place "Minuke," M-I-N-U-K-E My Nook Yes, that's what I said too. And not even the miserable excuse of its being phonetically correct Still, hardly worse than most

Well, at the start everything seemed quite jolly The Pritchards settled in and busied themselves with rearing a privet hedge and shoving flowers in They'd paid the first quarter in advance and, as far as I was concerned, were out of the picture for a bit

Then, about a fortnight after they'd moved in, I had a telephone call from Mrs P to say there was something odd about the kitchen tap Apparently the thing had happened twice The first time was when her sister was visiting them, and tried to fill the kettle no water would come through for a long time, then suddenly squirted violently and almost soaked the woman I gather the Pritchards hadn't really believed this—thought she was trying to find fault with their little nest—it had never happened before, and she couldn't make it happen again Then, about a week later, it did with Mrs. Pritchard this time After her husband had examined the tap and could find nothing wrong with it, he decided the water supply must be faulty. So they got on to me

I went round personally, as it was the first complaint from any of these bungalows The tap seemed normal, and I remember asking if the schoolboy son could have been experimenting with their main stop, when Mrs Pritchard, who had been fiddling with the tap, suddenly said, "Quick, look at this! It's off now!" They were quite cocky about its happening when I was there

It really was odd I turned the tap to the limit, but—not a drop! Not even the sort of gasping gurgle you hear when the supply is turned off at the main After a couple of minutes, though, it came on Water shot out with, I should say, about ten times normal force, as if it had been held under pressure Then gradually it died down and ran steadily

Both children were in the room with us until we all dodged out of the door to escape a soaking—it had splashed all over

the ceiling—so they couldn't have been up to any tricks I promised the Pritchards to have the pipes checked Before returning to town, I called at the next two bungalows in the row neither of the tenants had had any trouble at all with the water I thought, well, that localized it at least.

When I reached my office there was a telephone message waiting, from Pritchard I rang him back and he was obviously annoyed "Look here," he said, "not ten minutes after you left, we've had something else happen! The wall of the large bedroom's cracked from top to bottom. Big pieces of plaster fell, and the bed's in a terrible mess" And then he said, "You wouldn't have got me in a jerry-built place like this if I'd known!"

I had plasterers on the job next morning, and the whole water supply to "Minuke" under examination For about three days there was peace The tap behaved itself, and absolutely nothing was found to be wrong I was annoyed at what seemed to have been unnecessary expenditure It looked as if the Pritchards were going to be difficult—and I've had my share of that type fault-finding cranks occasionally carry eccentricity to the extent of a little private destruction, to prove their points I was on the watch from now on.

Then it came again

Pritchard rang me at my home, before nine in the morning His voice sounded a bit off Shaky

"For God's sake can you come round here right away," he said "Tell you about it when you get here" And then he said, almost fiercely, but quietly and close to the mouth-piece, "There's something damned queer about this place!" Dramatizing is a typical feature of all cranks, I thought, but particularly the little mousy kind, like Pritchard

I went to "Minuke" and found that Mrs Pritchard was in bed, in a state of collapse The doctor had given her a sleeping dose

Pritchard told me a tale that was chiefly remarkable for the expression on his face as he told it.

I don't know if you're familiar with the layout of that type of bungalow? The living room is in the front of the house, with the kitchen behind it To get from one to the other you have to use the little hallway, through two doors

But for convenience at mealtimes, there's a serving-hatch in the wall between these rooms. A small wooden door slides up and down over the hatch-opening.

"The wife was just passing a big plate of bacon and eggs through from the kitchen," Pritchard told me, "when the hatch door came down on her wrists. I saw it and I heard her yell. I thought the cord must've snapped, so I said, 'All right, all right' and went to pull it up because it's only a light wooden frame."

Pritchard was a funny color, and as far as I could judge, it was genuine.

"Do you know, it wouldn't come! I got my fingers under it and heaved, but it might have weighed two hundredweight. Once it gave an inch or so, and then pressed harder. That was it—it was *pressing* down! I heard the wife groan. I said, 'Hold on' and ripped round through the hall. When I got into the kitchen she was on the floor, fainted. And the hatch-door was hitched up as right as ninepence. That gave me a turn!" He sat down, quite deflated. It didn't appear to be put on. Still, ordinary neurotics can be almost as troublesome as out-and-out cranks.

I tested the hatch, gingerly; and, of course, the cords were sound and it ran easily.

"Possibly a bit stiff at times, being new," I said. "They're apt to jam if you're rough with them." And then, "By the way, just what were you hunting on the phone?"

He looked at me. It was warm sunlight outside, with a bus passing. Normal enough to take the mike out of Frankenstein's monster. "Never mind," he said, and gave a sheepish half-grin. "Bit of—well, funny construction in this house, though, eh?"

I'm afraid I was rather outspoken with him.

Let alone any twaddle about a month-old bungalow being haunted, I was determined to clamp down on this "jerry-building" talk. Perhaps I was beginning to have doubts myself.

I wrote straight off to the building company when I'd managed to trace them, busy developing an arterial road about three counties away. I dare say my letter was on the insinuating side. I think I asked if they had any record of

difficulties in the construction of this bungalow At any rate I got a snifly reply by return, stating that the matter was out of their hands in addition, their records were not available for discussion. Blind alley.

In the meantime, things at "Minuke" had worsened to a really frightening degree I dreaded the phone ringing One morning the two Pritchards senior awoke to find that nearly all the furniture in their bedroom had been moved about, including the bed they had been sleeping in they had felt absolutely nothing Food became suddenly and revoltingly decomposed All the chimney pots had come down, not just into the garden, but to the far side of the high road, except one which appeared, pulverized, on the living-room floor The obvious attempts of the Pritchards to keep a rational outlook had underlined most of my suspicions by this time

I managed to locate a local man who had been employed during the erection of the bungalows, as an extra hand He had worked only on the foundations of "Minuke," but what he had to say was interesting

They had found the going slow because of striking a layer of enormous flat stones, apparently trimmed slate, but as the site was otherwise excellent, they pressed on, using the stone as foundation where it fitted in with the plan, and laying down rubble where it didn't. The concrete skin over the rubble—my ears burned when I heard about that, I can tell you—this wretched so-called concrete had cracked, or shattered, several times Which wasn't entirely surprising, if it had been laid as he described. The flat stones, he said, had not been seriously disturbed A workmate had referred to them as "a giant's grave," so it was possibly an old burial mound Norse, perhaps—those are fairly common along this coast—or even very much older

Apart from this—I'm no diehard skeptic, I may as well confess—I was beginning to admit modest theories about a poltergeist, in spite of a lack of corroborative knockings and ornament-throwing There were two young children in the house, and the lore has it that kids are often unconsciously connected with phenomena of that sort, though usually

adolescents Still, in the real-estate profession you have to be careful, and if I could see the Pritchards safely off the premises without airing these possibilities, it might be kindest to the bungalow's future.

I went to "Minuke" the same afternoon.

It was certainly turning out an odd nook. I found a departing policeman on the doorstep That morning the back door had been burst in by a hundredweight or so of soil, and Mrs Pritchard was trying to convince herself that a practical joker had it in for them. The policeman had taken some notes, and was giving vague advice about "civil action" which showed that he was out of his depth.

Pritchard looked very tired, almost ill. "I've got leave from my job, to look after them," he said, when we were alone. I thought he was wise. He had given his wife's illness as the reason, and I was glad of that.

"I don't believe in—unnatural happenings," he said.

I agreed with him, non-committally.

"But I'm afraid of what ideas the kids might get. They're both at impressionable ages, y'know."

I recognized the symptoms without disappointment. "You mean, you'd rather move elsewhere," I said.

He nodded. "I like the district, mind you. But what I—"

There was a report like a gun in the very room.

I found myself with both arms up to cover my face There were tiny splinters everywhere, and a dust of fiber in the air. The door had exploded Literally.

To hark back to constructional details, it was one of those light, hollow frame-and-plywood jobs As you'll know, it takes considerable force to splinter plywood well, this was in tiny fragments And the oddest thing was that we had felt no blast effect.

In the next room I heard their dog howling. Pritchard was as stiff as a poker.

"I felt it!" he said. "I felt this lot coming I've got to knowing when something's likely to happen. It's all round!" Of course I began to imagine I'd sensed something too, but I doubt if I had really, my shock came with the crash Mrs Pritchard was in the doorway by this time with the kids behind her. He motioned them out and grabbed my arm.

"The thing is," he whispered, "that I can still feel it! Stronger than ever, by God! Look, will you stay at home tonight, in case I need—well, in case things get worse? I can phone you."

On my way back I called at the town library and managed to get hold of a volume on supernatural possession and what-not. Yes, I was committed now. But the library didn't specialize in that line, and when I opened the book at home, I found it was very little help "Vampires of south-eastern Europe" type of stuff I came across references to something the jargon called an "elemental" which I took to be a good deal more vicious and destructive than any poltergeist. A thoroughly nasty form of manifestation, if it existed. Those Norse gravestones were fitting into the picture uncomfortably well, it was fashionable in those days to be buried with all the trimmings, human sacrifice, and even more unmentionable attractions.

But I read on. After half a chapter on zombies and Romanian werewolves, the whole thing began to seem so fantastic that I turned seriously to working out methods of exploding somebody's door as a practical joke. Even a totally certifiable joker would be likelier than vampires. In no time I'd settled down with a whiskey, doodling wiring diagrams, and only occasionally—like twinges of conscience—speculating on contacting the psychic investigation people.

When the phone rang I was hardly prepared for it.

It was a confused, distant voice, gabbling desperately, but I recognized it as Pritchard. "For God's sake, don't lose a second! Get here—it's all hell on earth! Can't you hear it? My God, I'm going crazy!" And in the background I thought I was able to hear something. A sort of bubbling, shushing "wah-wah" noise. Indescribable. But you hear some odd sounds on telephones at any time.

"Yes," I said, "I'll come immediately. Why don't you all leave—" But the line had gone dead.

Probably I've never moved faster. I scrambled out to the car with untied shoes flopping, though I remembered to grab a heavy stick in the hall—whatever use it was to be. I drove like fury, heart belting, straight to "Minuke," expecting to see heaven knows what.

But everything looked still and normal there. The moon was up and I could see the whole place clearly. Curtained lights in the windows. Not a sound. I rang. After a moment Pritchard opened the door. He was quiet and seemed almost surprised to see me.

I pushed inside. "Well?" I said. "What's happened?"

"Not a thing, so far," he said. "That's why I didn't expect—"

I felt suddenly angry. "Look here," I said, "what are you playing at? Seems to me that any hoaxing round here begins a lot nearer home than you'd have me believe!" Then the penny dropped. I saw by the fright in his face that he knew something had gone wrong. That was the most horrible, sickening moment of the whole affair for me.

"Didn't you ring?" I said.

And he shook his head.

I've been in some tight spots. But there was always some concrete, actual business in hand to screw the mind safely down to. I suppose panic is when the subconscious breaks loose and everything in your head dashes screaming out. It was only just in time that I found a touch of the concrete and actual. A kiddie's paintbox on the floor, very watery.

"The children," I said. "Where are they?"

"Wife's just putting the little 'un to bed. She's been restless to-night. just wouldn't go, crying and difficult. Arthur's in the bathroom. Look here, what's happened?"

I told him, making it as short and matter of fact as I could. He turned ghastly.

"Better get them dressed and out of here right away," I said. "Make some excuse, not to alarm them."

He'd gone before I finished speaking.

I smoked hard, trying to build up the idea of "Hoax! Hoax!" in my mind. After all, it could have been. But I knew it wasn't.

Everything looked cosy and normal. Clock ticking. Fire red and mellow. Half-empty cocoa mug on the table. The sound of the sea from beyond the road. I went through to the kitchen. The dog was there, looking up from its sleeping-basket under the sink. "Good dog," I said, and it wriggled its tail.

MINUKE

Pritchard came in from the hall. He jumped when he saw me

"Getting nervy!" he said "They won't be long I don't know where we can go if we—well, if we have to—to leave tonight—"

"My car's outside," I told him "I'll fix you up Look here, did you ever 'hear things'? Odd noises?" I hadn't told him that part of the telephone call

He looked at me so oddly I thought he was going to collapse.

"I don't know," he said. "Can you?"

"At this moment?"

I listened

"No," I said "The clock on the shelf The sea. Nothing else No "

"The sea," he said, barely whispering. "But you can't hear the sea in this kitchen!"

He was close to me in an instant. Absolutely terrified. "Yes, I have heard this before! I think we all have I said it was the sea so as not to frighten them But it isn't. And I recognized it when I came in here just now That's what made me start. It's getting louder it does that."

He was right. Like slow breathing It seemed to emanate from inside the walls, not at a particular spot, but everywhere We went into the hall, then the front room it was the same there Mixed with it now was a sort of thin crying

"That's Nellie," Pritchard said. "The dog she always whimpers when it's on—too scared to howl My God, I've never heard it as loud as this before!"

"Hurry them up, will you!" I almost shouted He went

The "breathing" was ghastly Slobbering Stertorous, I think the term is And faster Oh, yes, I recognized it. The background music to the phone message My skin was pure ice

"Come along!" I yelled I switched on the little radio to drown the noise The old National Program, as it was in those days, for late dance music Believe it or not, what came through that loudspeaker was the same vile sighing noise, at double the volume And when I tried to switch off, it stayed the same

The whole bungalow was trembling The Pritchards came

running in, she carrying the little girl. "Get them into the car," I shouted We heard glass smashing somewhere

Above our heads there was an almighty thump Plaster showered down

Halfway out of the door the little girl screamed, "Nellie! Where's Nellie? Nellie, Nellie!"

"The dog!" Pritchard moaned "Oh, curse it!" He dragged them outside. I dived for the kitchen, where I'd seen the animal, feeling a lunatic for doing it. Plaster was springing out of the walls in painful showers

In the kitchen I found water everywhere One tap was squirting like a fire hose. The other was missing, water belching across the window from a torn end of pipe.

"Nellie!" I called.

Then I saw the dog It was lying near the oven, quite stiff. Round its neck was twisted a piece of painted piping with the other tap on the end

Sheer funk got me then. The ground was moving under me I bolted down the hall, nearly bumped into Pritchard. I yelled and shoved. I could actually feel the house at my back.

We got outside The noise was like a dreadful snoring, with rumbles and crashes thrown in One of the lights went out. "Nellie's run away," I said, and we all got into the car, the kids bawling I started up. People were coming out of the other bungalows—they're pretty far apart and the din was just beginning to make itself felt. Pritchard mumbled, "We can stop now Think it'd be safe to go back and grab some of the furniture?" As if he was at a fire, but I don't think he knew what he was doing

"Daddy—look!" screeched the boy.

We saw it. The chimney of "Minuke" was going up in a horrible way In the moonlight it seemed to grow, quite slowly, to about sixty feet, like a giant crooked finger And then—burst. I heard bricks thumping down. Somewhere somebody screamed.

There was a glare like an ungodly great lightning-flash. It lasted for a second or so.

Of course we were dazzled, but I thought I saw the whole of "Minuke" fall suddenly and instantaneously flat, like a

swatted fly. I probably did, because that's what happened, anyway

There isn't much more to tell

Nobody was really hurt, and we were able to put down the whole thing to a serious electrical fault. Main fuses had blown throughout the whole district, which helped this theory out. Perhaps it was unfortunate in another respect, because a lot of people changed over to gas.

There wasn't much recognizable left of "Minuke". But some of the bits were rather unusual. Knots in pipes, for instance—I buried what was left of the dog myself. Wood and brick cleanly sliced. Small quantities of completely powdered metal. The bath had been squashed flat, like tinfoil. In fact, Pritchard was lucky to land the insurance money for his furniture.

My professional problem, of course, remained. The plot where the wretched place had stood. I managed to persuade the owner it wasn't ideal for building on. Incidentally, lifting those stones might reveal something to somebody some day—but not to me, thank you!

I think my eventual solution showed a touch of wit. I let it very cheaply as scrap-metal dump.

Well? I know I've never been able to make any sense out of it. I hate telling you all this stuff, because it must make me seem either a simpleton or a charlatan. In so far as there's any circumstantial evidence in looking at the place, you can see it in a moment or two. Here's the coast road . . .

The car pulled up at a bare spot beyond a sparse line of bungalows. The space was marked by a straggling, tufty square of privet bushes. Inside I could see a tangle of rusting iron springs, a car chassis, oil drums.

"The hedge keeps it from being too unsightly," said the estate agent, as we crossed to it. "See—the remains of the gate."

A few half-rotten slats dangled from an upright. One still bore part of a chrome-plated name "MI—" and, a little farther on, "K".

"Nothing worth seeing now," he said. I peered inside. "Not that there ever was much—Look out!" I felt a violent

push In the same instant something zipped past my head and crashed against the car behind "My God! Went right at you!" gasped the agent

It had shattered a window of the car and gone through the open door opposite We found it in the road beyond, sizzling on the Tarmac A heavy steel nut, white-hot

"I don't know about you," the estate agent said, "but I'm rather in favor of getting out of here."

And we did Quickly.

John Collier

Bird of Prey

The house they call the Engineer's house is now deserted. The new man from Baton Rouge gave it up after living less than a month in it, and built himself a two-room shack with his own money, on the very farthest corner of the company's land.

The roof of the Engineer's house has caved in, and most of the windows are broken. Oddly enough, no birds nest in the shelter of the eaves, or take advantage of the forsaken rooms. An empty house is normally fine harborage for rats and mice and bats, but there is no squeak or rustle or scamper to disturb the quiet of this one. Only creatures utterly foreign, utterly remote from the most distant cousinhood to man, only the termite, the tarantula, and the scorpion indifferently make it their home.

All in a few years Edna Spalding's garden has been wiped out as if it had never existed. The porch where she and Jack sat so happily in the evenings is rotten under its load of wind-blown twigs and sand. A young tree has already burst up the boards outside the living-room window, so that they fan out like the stiff fingers of someone who is afraid. In this corner there still stands a strongly made parrot's perch, the wood of which has been left untouched even by the termite and the boring beetle.

The Spaldings brought a parrot with them when first they came. It was a sort of extra wedding present, given them at the last moment by Edna's mother. It was something from home for Edna to take into the wilds.

The parrot was already old, and he was called Tom, and, like other parrots, he sat on his perch, and whistled and laughed and uttered his few remarks, which were often very appropriate. Edna and Jack were both very fond of him, and they were overwhelmingly fond of each other. They liked

their house, and the country, and Jack's colleagues, and everything in life seemed to be delightful.

One night they had just fallen asleep when they were awakened by a tremendous squawking and fluttering outside on the porch. "Oh, Jack!" cried Edna. "Get up! Hurry! Run! It's one of those cats from the men's camp has got hold of poor Tom!"

Jack sprang out of bed, but caught his foot in the sheet; and landed on his elbow on the floor. Between rubbing his elbow and disentangling his foot, he wasted a good many seconds before he was up again. Then he dashed through the living-room and out upon the porch.

All this time, which seemed an age, the squawking and fluttering increased, but as he flung open the door it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The whole porch was bathed in the brightest moonlight, and at the farther end the perch was clearly visible, and on the floor beneath it was poor old Tom parrot, gasping amid a litter of his own feathers, and crying, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

At any rate he was alive. Jack looked right and left for traces of his assailant, and at once noticed the long, heavy trailers of the trumpet vine were swinging violently, although there was not a breath of wind. He went to the rail and looked out and around, but there was no sign of a cat. Of course, it was not likely there would be. Jack was more interested in the fact that the swaying vines were spread over a length of several feet, which seemed a very great deal of disturbance for a fleeing cat to make. Finally he looked up, and he thought he saw a bird—a big bird, an enormous bird—flying away. He just caught a glimpse of it as it crossed the brightness of the moon.

He turned back and picked up old Tom. The poor parrot's chain was broken, and his heart was pounding away like mad, and still, like a creature hurt and shocked beyond all endurance, he cried, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

This was all the more odd, for it was seldom the old fellow came out with a new phrase, and Jack would have laughed heartily, except it sounded too pathetic. So he carefully examined the poor bird, and finding no injury beyond the loss of a handful of feathers from his neck, he replaced

him on the perch, and turned to reassure Edna, who now appeared in the doorway

"Is he dead?" cried she

"No," said Jack. "He's had a bit of shock, though Something got hold of him "

"I'll bring him a piece of sugar," said Edna "That's what he loves That'll make him feel better "

She soon brought the sugar, which Tom took in his claw, but though usually he would nibble it up with the greatest avidity, this time he turned his lack-lustre eye only once upon it, and gave a short, bitter, despairing sort of laugh, and let it fall to the ground

"Let him rest," said Jack "He has had a bad tousling "

"It was a cat," said Edna "It was one of those beastly cats the men have at the camp "

"Maybe," said Jack "On the other hand—I don't know I thought I saw an enormous bird flying away "

"It couldn't be an eagle," said Edna "There are none ever seen here "

"I know," said Jack "Besides, they don't fly at night. Nor do the buzzards It might have been an owl, I suppose But—"

"But what?" said Edna

"But it looked very much larger than an owl," said Jack.

"It was your fancy," said Edna "It was one of those beastly cats that did it "

This point was discussed very frequently during the next few days Everybody was consulted, and everybody had an opinion Jack might have been a little doubtful at first, for he had caught only the briefest glimpse as the creature crossed the moon, but opposition made him more certain, and the discussions sometimes got rather heated

"Charlie says it was all your imagination," said Edna. "He says no owl would ever attack a parrot."

"How the devil does *he* know?" said Jack. "Besides, I said it was bigger than an owl "

"He says that shows you imagine things," said Edna.

"Perhaps he would like me to think I do," said Jack "Perhaps you both would "

"Oh, Jack!" cried Edna She was deeply hurt, and not without reason, for it showed that Jack was still thinking

of a ridiculous mistake he had made, a real mistake, of the sort that young husbands sometimes do make, when they come suddenly into a room and people are startled without any real reason for it Charlie was young and free and easy and good-looking, and he would put his hand on your shoulder without even thinking about it, and nobody minded.

"I should not have said that," said Jack.

"No, indeed you shouldn't," said Edna, and she was right.

The parrot said nothing at all All these days he had been moping and ailing, and seemed to have forgotten even how to ask for sugar. He only groaned and moaned to himself, ruffled up his feathers, and every now and then shook his head in the most rueful, miserable way you can possibly imagine.

One day, however, when Jack came home from work, Edna put her finger to her lips and beckoned him to the window "Watch Tom," she whispered

Jack peered out. There was the old bird, lugubriously climbing down from his perch and picking some dead stalks from the vine, which he carried up till he gained a corner where the balustrade ran into the wall, and added his gatherings to others that were already there He trod round and round, twisted his stalks in and out, and, always with the same doleful expression, paid great attention to the nice disposition of a feather or two, a piece of wood, a fragment of cellophane There was no doubt about it.

"There's no doubt about it," said Jack.

"He's making a nest!" cried Edna

"He!" cried Jack. "He! I like that. The old impostor! The old male impersonator! She's going to lay an egg Thomasina—that's her name from now on."

Thomasina it was Two or three days later the matter was settled beyond the shadow of a doubt There, one morning, in the ramshackle nest, was an egg

"I thought she was sick because of that shaking she got," said Jack. "She was broody, that's all."

"It's a monstrous egg," said Edna. "Poor birdie!"

"What do you expect, after God knows how many years?" said Jack, laughing "Some birds lay eggs nearly as big as

themselves—the kiwi or something Still, I must admit it's a whopper ”

“She doesn't look well,” said Edna

Indeed, the old parrot looked almost as sick as a parrot can be, which is several times sicker than any other living creature Her eyes closed up, her head sank, and if a finger was put out to scratch her she turned her beak miserably away However, she sat conscientiously on the prodigious egg she had laid, though every day she seemed a little feebler than before

“Perhaps we ought to take the egg away,” said Jack “We could get it blown, and keep it as a memento ”

“No,” said Edna. “Let her have it. It's all she's had in all these years ”

Here Edna made a mistake, and she realized it a few mornings later “Jack,” she called “Do come It's Tom—Thomasina, I mean I'm afraid she's going to die ”

“We ought to have taken the egg away,” said Jack, coming out with his mouth full of breakfast. “She's exhausted herself It's no good, anyway It's bound to be sterile ”

“Look at her!” cried Edna

“She's done for,” said Jack, and at that moment the poor old bird keeled over and gasped her last.

“The egg killed her,” said Jack, picking it up “I said it would Do you want to keep it? Oh, good Lord!” He put the egg down very quickly “It's alive,” he said

“What?” said Edna “What do you mean?”

“It gave me a turn,” said Jack “It's most extraordinary It's against nature There's a chick inside that egg, tapping ”

“Let it out,” said Edna “Break the shell.”

“I was right,” said Jack. “It was a bird I saw It must have been a stray parrot Only it looked so big ”

“I'm going to break the shell with a spoon,” said Edna, running to fetch one

“It'll be a lucky bird,” said Jack when she returned “Born with a silver spoon in its beak, so to speak. Be careful.”

“I will,” said Edna. “Oh, I do hope it lives!”

With that she gingerly cracked the shell, the tapping increased, and soon they saw a well-developed beak tearing

its way through. In another moment the chick was born.

"Golly!" cried Jack. "What a monster!"

"It's because it's young," said Edna. "It'll grow lovely. Like its mother."

"Maybe," said Jack. "I must be off. Put it in the nest. Feed it pap. Keep it warm. Don't monkey with it too much. Good-bye, my love."

That morning Jack telephoned home two or three times to find out how the chick was, and if it ate. He rushed home at lunchtime. In the evening everyone came round to peep at the nestling and offer advice.

Charlie was there. "It ought to be fed every hour at least," said he. "That's how it is in nature."

"He's right," said Jack. "For the first month at least, that's how it should be."

"It looks as if I'm going to be tied down a bit," said Edna ruefully.

"I'll look in when I pass and relieve your solitude," said Charlie.

"I'll manage to rush home now and then in the afternoons," said Jack, a little too thoughtfully.

Certainly the hourly feeding seemed to agree with the chick, which grew at an almost alarming speed. It became covered with down, feathers sprouted, in a few months it was fully grown, and not in the least like its mother. For one thing, it was coal-black.

"It must be a hybrid," said Jack. "There is a black parrot; I've seen them in zoos. They didn't look much like this, though I've half a mind to send a photograph of him somewhere."

"He looks so wicked," said Edna.

"He looks cunning," said Jack. "That bird knows everything, believe me. I bet he'll talk soon."

"It gave a sort of laugh," said Edna. "I forgot to tell you."

"When?" cried Jack. "A laugh?"

"Sort of," said Edna. "But it was horrible. It made Charlie nearly jump out of his skin."

"Charlie?" cried Jack. "You didn't say he'd been here."

"Well, you know how often he drops in," said Edna.

"Do I?" said Jack "I hope I do God! What was that?"

"That's 'what I meant,'" said Edna "A sort of laugh"

"What a horrible sound!" said Jack

"Listen, Jack," said Edna "I wish you wouldn't be silly about Charlie You are, you know "

Jack looked at her "I know I am," said he "I know it when I look at you And then I think I never will be again But somehow it's got stuck in my mind, and the least little thing brings it on Maybe I'm just a bit crazy, on that one subject "

"Well, he'll be transferred soon," said Edna. "And that'll be the end of it "

"Where did you hear that?" said Jack.

"He told me this afternoon," said Edna "He was on his way back from getting the mail when he dropped in That's why he told me first Otherwise he'd have told you first. Only he hasn't seen you yet Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Jack. "I wish I could be psychoanalyzed or something "

Soon Charlie made his farewells, and departed for his job on the company's other project Edna was secretly glad to see him go She wanted no problems, however groundless, to exist between herself and Jack A few days later she felt sure that all the problems were solved for ever

"Jack," said she when he came home in the evening

"Yes," said he

"Something new," said she "Don't play with that bird. Listen to me "

"Call him Polly," said Jack. They had named it Polly to be on the safe side "You don't want to call him 'that bird.' The missus doesn't love you, Poll "

"Do you know, I don't!" said Edna, with quite startling vehemence "I don't like him at all, Jack Let's give him away "

"What? For heaven's sake!" cried Jack "This rare, black, specially hatched Poll? This parrot of romantic origin? The cleverest Poll that ever—"

"That's it," said Edna. "He's too darned clever Jack, I hate him. He's horrible "

"What? Has he said something you don't like?" said Jack, laughing "I bet he will, when he talks. But what's the news, anyway?"

"Come inside," said Edna "I'm not going to tell you with that creature listening" She led the way into the bedroom. "The news is," said she, "that I've got to be humoured. And if I don't like anything, it's got to be given away It's not going to be born with a beak because its mother was frightened by a hateful monstrosity of a parrot."

"What?" said Jack.

"That's what," said Edna, smiling and nodding.

"A brat?" cried Jack in delight. "A boy! Or a girl! It's bound to be one or the other Listen, I was afraid to tell you how much I wanted one, Edna Oh, boy! This is going to make everything very, very fine Lie down. You're delicate Put your feet up I'm going to fix dinner. This is practice Stay still Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Or girl as the case may be!"

He went out through the living-room on his way to the kitchen. As he passed the window he caught sight of the parrot on the dark porch outside, and he put his head through to speak to it.

"Have you heard the news?" said he. "Behold a father! You're going to be cut right out, my bird. You're going to be given away Yes, sir, it's a baby."

The parrot gave a long low whistle. "You don't say so?" said he in a husky voice, a voice of apprehension, a quite astonishing imitation of Charlie's voice. "What about Jack?"

"What's that?" said Jack, startled.

"He'll think it's his," whispered the parrot in Edna's voice. "He's fool enough for anything Kiss me, darling. Phew-w-w! You don't say so? What about Jack? He'll think it's his, he's fool enough for anything. Kiss me, darling Phew-w-w!"

Jack went out into the kitchen, and sat down with his head in his hands for several minutes.

"Hurry up!" cried Edna from the bedroom. "Hurry up—Father!"

"I'm coming," said Jack.

He went to his desk, and took out the revolver. Then he went into the bedroom

At the sound of the cry and the shot, the parrot laughed

Then, lifting its claw, it took the chain in its beak, and bit through it as if it were paper

Jack came out, holding the gun, his hand over his eyes
"Fool enough for anything!" said the parrot, and laughed.

Jack turned the gun on himself As he did so, in the infinitesimal interval between the beginning and the end of the movement of his finger on the trigger, he saw the bird grow, spread its dark wings, and its eyes flamed, and it changed, and it launched itself toward him.

The gun went off Jack dropped to the floor The parrot, or whatever it was, sailing down, seized what came out of his ruined mouth, and wheeled back through the window, and was soon far away, visible for a moment only as it swept on broader wings past the new-risen moon.

The Thing in the Cellar

It was a large cellar, entirely out of proportion to the house above it. The owner admitted that it was probably built for a distinctly different kind of structure from the one which rose above it. Probably the first house had been burned, and poverty had caused a diminution of the dwelling erected to take its place.

A winding stone stairway connected the cellar with the kitchen. Around the base of this series of steps successive owners of the house had placed their firewood, winter vegetables, and junk. The junk had gradually been pushed back till it rose, head high, in a barricade of uselessness. What was back of that barricade no one knew and no one cared. For some hundreds of years no one had crossed it to penetrate to the black reaches of the cellar behind.

At the top of the steps, separating the kitchen from the cellar, was a stout oaken door. This door was, in a way, as peculiar and out of relation to the rest of the house as the cellar. It was a strange kind of door to find in a modern house, and certainly a most unusual door to find in the inside of the house—thick, stoutly built, dexterously rabbeted together, with huge wrought-iron hinges, and a lock that looked as though it came from Castle Despair. Separating a house from the outside world, such a door would be excusable, swinging between kitchen and cellar, it seemed peculiarly inappropriate.

From the earliest months of his life Tommy Tucker seemed unhappy in the kitchen. In the front parlor, in the formal dining-room, and especially on the second floor of the house he acted like a normal, healthy child, but carry him to the kitchen, and he began at once to cry. His parents, being plain people, ate in the kitchen save when they had company. Being poor, Mrs. Tucker did most of her work, though occasionally she had a charwoman in to do the extra Saturday work.

day cleaning, and thus much of her time was spent in the kitchen Tommy stayed with her, at least as long as he was unable to walk. Much of the time he was decidedly unhappy.

When Tommy learned to crawl, he lost no time in leaving the kitchen. No sooner was his mother's back turned than the little fellow crawled as fast as he could for the doorway opening into the front of the house, the dining-room, and the front parlor. Once away from the kitchen he seemed happy, at least he ceased to cry. On being returned to the kitchen his howls so thoroughly convinced the neighbors that he had colic that more than one bowl of catnip and sage tea were brought to him.

It was not until the boy learned to talk that the Tuckers had any idea as to what made him cry so hard when he was in the kitchen. He had to suffer for months until he obtained a little relief, and even when he told his parents what was the matter they were absolutely unable to comprehend. This is not to be wondered at, because they were both hard-working, rather simple-minded persons.

What they finally learned from their little son was this that if the cellar door was shut and securely fastened with the heavy iron lock, Tommy could at least eat a meal in peace, if the door was simply closed and not locked, he shivered with fear, but kept quiet, but if the door stood open, if even the slightest streak of black showed that it was not tightly shut, then the little three-year-old would scream himself to the point of exhaustion, especially if his father would refuse him permission to leave the kitchen.

Playing in the kitchen, the child developed two interesting habits. Rags, scraps of paper, and splinters of wood were continually being pushed under the thick oak door to fill the space between the door and the sill. Whenever Mrs. Tucker opened the door, there was always some trash there, placed by her son. It annoyed her, and more than once the little fellow was spanked for this conduct, but punishment acted in no way as a deterrent. The other habit was as singular. Once the door was closed and locked, he would rather boldly walk over to it and caress the old lock. Even when he was so small that he had to stand on tiptoe to

touch it with the tips of his fingers he would touch it with slow caressing strokes; later on, as he grew, he used to kiss it

His father, who only saw the boy at the end of the day, decided that there was no sense in such conduct, and in his masculine way tried to break the lad of his foolishness There was, of necessity, no effort on the part of the hard-working man to understand the psychology back of his son's conduct. All that the man knew was that his little son was acting in a way that was decidedly queer.

Tommy loved his mother, and was willing to do anything he could to help her in the household tasks, but one thing he would not do, and never did do, and that was to fetch and carry between the house and the cellar If his mother opened the door he would run screaming from the room, and he never returned voluntarily until he was assured that the door was closed.

He never explained just why he acted as he did In fact, he refused to talk about it, at least to his parents, and that was just as well, because had he done so they would simply have been more positive than ever that there was something wrong with their only child They tried, in their own way, to break the child of his unusual habits; failing to change him at all, they decided to ignore his peculiarities

That is, they ignored them until he was six years old and the time came for him to go to school He was a sturdy little chap by that time, and more intelligent than the average boy beginning in the primary class. Mr. Tucker was at times proud of him, the child's attitude toward the cellar door was the one thing most disturbing to the father's pride Finally nothing would do but that the Tucker family call on the neighborhood physician. It was an important event in the life of the Tuckers

"The matter is just this, Dr. Hawthorn," said Mr Tucker in a somewhat embarrassed manner. "Our little Tommy is old enough to start school, but he behaves childishly in regard to our cellar, and the missus and I thought you could tell us what to do about it. It must be his nerves "

"Ever since he was a baby," added Mrs Tucker, taking up the thread of conversation where her husband had paused.

"Tommy has had a great fear of the cellar. Even now, big boy that he is, he doesn't love me enough to fetch and carry for me through that door and down those steps. It's not natural for a child to act like he does, and what with chinking the cracks with rags and kissing the lock, he drives me to the point where I fear he may become daft as he grows older."

The doctor, eager to satisfy his customers, and dimly remembering some lectures on the nervous system received when he was a medical student, asked some general questions, listened to the boy's heart, examined his lungs, and looked at his eyes and fingernails.

"Looks like a fine, healthy boy, to me," he said at last.

"Yes, all except the cellar door," replied the father.

"Has he ever been sick?"

"Naught but fits once or twice when he cried himself blue in the face," answered the mother.

"Frightened?"

"Perhaps. It was always in the kitchen."

"Suppose you go out and let me talk to Tommy by myself?"

And there sat the doctor very much at his ease, and the little six-year-old boy very uneasy.

"Tommy, what is in the cellar you're afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"No, sir."

"Ever heard it? Smelt it?"

"No, sir."

"Then how do you know something is there?"

"Because there is."

That was as far as Tommy would go, and at last his seeming obstinacy annoyed the physician even as it had for several years annoyed Mr. Tucker. He went to the door and called the parents into the room.

"He thinks there's something down in the cellar," he said.

The Tuckers simply looked at each other.

"That's foolish," answered Mr. Tucker finally.

"It's just a plain cellar with junk and firewood and cider barrels in it," added Mrs. Tucker. "Since we moved into that house I haven't missed a day without going down those stone steps, and I know nothing's there. But the lad has

always screamed when the door was open I recall now that since he was a child in arms he has always screamed when that door was open "

"He thinks there's something there," repeated the doctor

"That's why we asked you to see him," replied the father.
"It's the child's nerves "

"I'll tell you what to do," advised the doctor "He thinks there's something there Just as soon as he finds that he's wrong and that there's nothing there, he'll forget about it. He has been humored too much. What you want to do is to open that cellar door and make him stay by himself in the kitchen Nail the door open so he can't close it. Leave him alone there for an hour, and then go and laugh at him and show him how silly it was for him to be afraid of an empty cellar I'll give you some nerve and blood tonic and that will help, but the big thing is to show him there's nothing to be afraid of "

On the way back to the Tucker home Tommy broke away from his parents. They caught him after an exciting chase, and kept him between them the rest of the way home Once in the house he disappeared, only to be found in the guest-room under the bed The afternoon being already spoiled for Mr. Tucker, he determined to keep the child under observation for the rest of the day. Tommy ate no supper, in spite of the urgings of the unhappy mother The dishes were washed, the evening paper read, the evening pipe smoked, and then Mr Tucker took down his tool-box and got out a hammer and some long nails

"And I'm going to nail the door open, Tommy, so you can't close it, as that was what the doctor said, and you're to be a man and stay here in the kitchen alone for an hour. We'll leave the lamp burning, and then when you find there's nothing to be afraid of, you'll be well and a real man and not a son for a father to be ashamed of "

But at the last Mrs Tucker kissed Tommy and cried and whispered to her husband not to do it, and to wait until the boy was larger, but nothing was to do except to nail the thick door open so it could not be shut, and leave the boy there alone with the lamp burning and the dark open space

of the doorway to look at with eyes that grew as hot and burning as the flame of the lamp

That same day Dr Hawthorn took supper with a classmate of his, a man who specialized in psychiatry, and who was particularly interested in children. Hawthorn told Johnson about his newest case, the little Tucker boy, and asked him for his opinion. Johnson frowned

"Children are odd, Hawthorn. Perhaps they are like dogs. It may be their nervous system is more acute than in the adult. We know that our eyesight is limited, also our hearing, and smell. I firmly believe that there are forms of life which exist in such a form that we can neither see, hear, nor smell them. Fondly we delude ourselves into the fallacy of believing that they don't exist because we can't prove their existence. This Tucker lad may be peculiarly acute. He may dimly appreciate the existence of something in the cellar which is unappreciable to his parents. Evidently there's some basis to this fear of his. Now I'm not saying there *is* anything in the cellar. In fact, I suppose it's just an ordinary cellar, but this boy, since he was a baby, has thought that there was something there, and that's just as bad as though there actually were. What I would like to know is, what makes him think so? Give me the address, and I'll call tomorrow and have a talk with the little fellow."

"What do you think of my advice?"

"Sorry, old man, but I think it was perfectly rotten. If I were you I would stop round there on my way home and prevent them from following it. The little fellow may be badly frightened. You see, he evidently thinks there's something there."

"But there isn't."

"Perhaps not. No doubt he's wrong, but he thinks so."

It worried Dr Hawthorn so much that he decided to take his friend's advice. It was a cold, foggy night, and the physician was cold as he tramped along the streets, but at last he came to the Tucker house. He remembered now that he had been there once before, long ago, when little

Tommy Tucker came into the world. There was a light in the front window, and in no time at all Mr. Tucker came to the door.

"I've come to see Tommy," said the doctor.

"He's back in the kitchen," replied the father.

"He gave one cry, but since then he's been quiet," sobbed Mrs. Tucker.

"If I'd let her have her way she would have opened the door, but I said to her, 'Mother, now's the time to make a man out of our Tommy.' And I guess he knows by now that there was nothing to fear. Well, the hour is up. Suppose we go and get him and put him to bed?"

"It's been a hard time for the child," whispered Mrs. Tucker.

Carrying the candle, the man walked ahead of the woman and the doctor, and at last opened the kitchen door. The room was dark.

"Lamp has gone out," said the man. "Wait until I light it."

"Tommy! Tommy!" called Mrs. Tucker.

But the doctor ran to where a white form was stretched on the floor. Sharply he called for more light. Trembling, he examined all that was left of little Tommy. Twitching, he looked down the open space into the cellar. At last he turned to Tucker and Tucker's wife.

"Tommy—Tommy has been hurt. I guess he's dead!" he stammered.

The mother threw herself on the floor and picked up the torn, mutilated thing that had been, only a little while ago, her son.

Tucker took his hammer, drew out the nails and closed the door. He locked it and drove in a long spike to reinforce the lock. Then he took hold of the doctor's shoulders and shook him.

"What killed him, Doctor? What killed him?" he shouted at Hawthorn.

The doctor looked at him bravely in spite of the fear in his throat.

"How do I know, Tucker?" he replied. "How do I know? Didn't you tell me that there was nothing there? Nothing down there? In the cellar?"

Will Jenkins

Devil's Henchman

When Joe Burchard wore the witch ring from the outland country and fought with the devil in Ben Harper's body, the morning didn't start out any different from any other. The sun rose over the mountains, and the shadows were long and sprawling, and all the spider webs shone like diamonds. The wind blew overhead, going from yonder to some other place. Smoke from the cabins all up and down the valley streaked out long and low. It was a mighty nice day to be twenty-one years old in, like Joe was. He'd licked every man but one in a day's walking, and he'd courted and kissed every girl but two.

He didn't know a thing about the witch ring that morning, though. He sat in his granny's cabin and ate the breakfast she'd cooked him. He felt purely fine, like a body does when he's twenty-one and tall and broad and hasn't got a care in the world. He breathed in, and it felt good. He breathed out, and it felt even better.

His granny looked at him sharp whilst he was eating his breakfast. She'd been a witching woman once and she could see more in a peek than most in a gape, and Joe was her only kin and she loved him like nobody but a granny is able to. He had on his store-going red wool shirt and his Saturday pants. That meant he'd be going down to Crowder's Store, where three roads crossed and the young men loafed around to show off to each other and the girls that came to the store with their ma's.

"Huh!" says Joe's granny.

"Dressed up! You aim to be kissing some young girl and fighting some young man this morning. I know the signs."

He grinned at her. "Now," he says, "the fella ain't so young. He's Ben Harper. And the girl—I ain't sure, but Letty Smith asked me to stop by her folks' cabin for a letter she'd like to get mailed."

His granny thumped the floor with her stick, fretful.

"Foolish! Foolish! Foolish!" she says "To you, it's fun, but Ben Harper's been craving Letty since she was old enough to look cornerways He wouldn't fight no fist fight with somebody he thought she favored! He's got black eyes and no lobes to his ears, and that's a sign he ain't no fist-fighting man He'll take to a knife or worse, he will!"

"Shucks!" says Joe "There's the law, granny. Them days are long gone He'd as soon take to witching"

"He might do that," says Joe's granny, peevish "You're young yet, honey. You don't know what can happen inside a man when a girl he craves laughs at him. And if a man's heart is wrong and his cravings hot, there's ways of turning to witchery But you, now—supposing you do kiss Letty at her folks' cabin and lick Ben Harper down to the store?"

Joe laughed, and he wiped his mouth

"That's something I ain't figured out yet," he says.

His granny snapped, "There's Sally" Sally Walker was the only girl besides Letty in a day's walking that Joe hadn't courted and kissed, and Joe's granny thought a lot of Sally. But Joe didn't look up.

"No—o," says Joe "I've known her all my born days It wouldn't be no fun to court Sally or to kiss her She's pretty enough She's sweet She's a right nice girl But I just ain't got a mind to her."

His granny says, angry, "I was a witchin' woman once, before I got religion and married your grandpa. I know what's the matter You're scared Sally wouldn't like you kissing her. You're—scared! I'd ought to do a little witchin'—"

Joe laughed and he got up and he went over and gave his granny a hug

"You wouldn't witch me," he says

"I wouldn't witch nobody," says his granny, peevish. "I promised your grandpa and I promised the Lord Else I'd show you Go along with you"

She gave him a shove and he laughed again and went over to the mirror that his granny kept tacked up on the wall. It was a sign and a reminder of what she'd given up, because a witching woman can't abide a mirror Joe bent down to look in it, and he took a comb and he parted his straight

black hair because he'd be stopping by Letty's folks' cabin, and she'd be there by her lone

Then he went out of the cabin and striding on his way, and the sun was shining bright and a bobwhite called somewhere off in the woods, and the sky was so blue even a young man had to notice it. It felt purely good to be alive and young and a-walking to kiss a girl another man pined for, and fight that man and lick him after Joe didn't take his granny's fussing serious. She'd got religion and married Joe's grandpa and he was waiting for her over Jordan and she wouldn't disappoint him. So Joe went on his way with nothing on his mind but the pleasure it was to be alive. He didn't think about the witching ring, that's sure. He didn't know there was such a thing.

But presently he thought about Sally. Her folks' cabin was the nearest to his granny's and when his own ma and pa died off while he was small he came to live with his granny. He could remember Sally from when neither of them was knee-high to a duck. And now he was grown-up, thinking of Sally gave him a queer kind of sad feeling, and a yearning feeling, and a scared feeling, too. So he backed down from thinking about her as much as he could.

The speckled shadows passed over as he walked. Birds chirped and katydids whirred all about. He went uphill and down, and all of a sudden he looked and there was Letty Smith's folks' cabin up above him and the gray rocks sticking out of the hillside all around. And sudden-like he knew that he didn't want to kiss Letty, but he was bounden to. He was going to fight Ben Harper, and Ben Harper craved Letty so bad that his eyes shone wild when they looked at her, and he'd never got religion. But she'd told Joe that her ma and her pa were going over the mountains to hear the new preacher and she'd have to stay home to look after the stock, and would he stop by to get a letter to mail for her down at Crowder's.

Joe stopped short and grunted to himself. He kind of fumed, because all of a sudden he didn't care a thing about kissing Letty. And that wasn't natural, with him being twenty-one. He caught himself thinking, "If it was Sally, now—" and

then he thought suspicious of his granny. She could make him feel this way if she liked. A spell muttered over a crumb of cornbread he'd eat the rest of out in the yard because of the mirror on the wall

But he knew his granny wouldn't witch him even for his own good She'd got religion years ago

So Joe took a deep breath and climbed up the hillside, frowning to himself because it was funny he didn't want to kiss a pretty girl But still he wasn't thinking about witchery, and least of all about the witch ring.

He stepped over the stile and went across the pasture to the cabin There wasn't any noise but the chickens pecking and clucking and the wind above the Hollow. He opened his mouth to call, but the door opened and there was Letty looking at him. Her hair was straggly and she wasn't primped up She looked white and scared and half crazy with crying and grief She didn't say a word Her hands were shaking.

"What's the matter?" says Joe, uncomfortable. "You sick?"

She didn't say a word, just looked at him imploring. And Joe felt queer

He says, suspicious, "You sure act funny, Letty. You act like you was witched."

And that was what had to be said before Letty could speak. She put her face in her hands and she moaned

"I am witched!" she cried. "That's it, Joe—I am!"

Now, Joe wasn't scared of witchery like some people, because his granny had told him—and she'd ought to know—that witchery hasn't got any power over a man unless his heart is wrong

So Joe says, curious, "How does it take you, Letty? How does it feel?"

"I'm pins and needles all over," says Letty, pitiful, "and I itch and I ache to go to the one that's witched me, and nobody else can come near me without a pain in my heart and my breath stopping So don't come near me, Joe. I'm witched and if you do I'll fall down dead." But she cried, heartbroken.

Joe shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Letty looked mighty pitiful, and she looked at him so pleading that

it was right much of a dare for a young man that was twenty-one years old

"My granny says," says Joe, "that witching ain't got any power if your heart's right"

Then Letty cried harder

"I know," she says bitter "I know all that. But I've had hate in my heart a long time I hated Ben Harper because he craved me to love him and he wasn't the right one I hated the girls you courted, because they wasn't me There's no harm telling you because I'm witched, but I've laid awake nights thinking of you and I—I—" She says, heartbroke, "I've tried to witch you to dream love dreams of me and that's give witchery the power over me And if you was to come near me now I'd have a pain in my heart and my breath would stop and I'd drop down dead"

Then she wrung her hands and cried desperate but her eyes went to him pleading And Joe shifted his weight back to the foot he'd been standing on before It's a mighty fine thing to be twenty-one, but Joe knew better than to fool with witchery He thought hard, fidgeting Letty'd been trying to witch him into loving her, and that was what gave witchery the power over her, so she was witched because of him.

She was a pretty girl, too, when she wasn't crying Joe knew better than to look too close, but he did know that she was thin where a girl had ought to be thin, and where a girl oughtn't to be, she wasn't She'd be nice to go buggy riding with or a-courtin, but Joe hadn't ever thought of wanting to marry her

"Who witched you?" says Joe, unhappy "If I'm what made the trouble you're in, I'd ought to try to get you out."

"It's Ben Harper," says Letty "He boiled a black cat in a kettle and threw the bones in a running stream, and he gave up crossing over Jordan and a man came and told him what to do He told me So I got to go to him, Joe Please help me So long as he's living, unless he takes the witching off, I'm suffering, and flesh and blood can't stand but so much!"

Then she twitched and she shivered and she gasped and

she panted like she was going to have a fit

Joe backed away, considerate, and he says, "I was figuring on seeing him down to the store today and he's the last man in a day's walking that I ain't licked. But if he's been fooling with a black cat's bones and started witching, it ain't no ordinary flesh and blood can lick him. My granny—"

"She won't help none," says Letty, a-wringing her hands. "She's got religion. And there ain't anything else can help me but Ben Harper dying or taking the witching off of me. But you could make him, Joe. There ain't anything I won't do for you, Joe, if only you'll do that for me!"

"You hold on," says Joe, "and I'll do it. You go stand on a rock in a running stream. That'll weaken the witchery and I'll tend to Ben Harper."

And he turned and he left her. And first off he started straight for Ben's cabin, figuring that Ben wouldn't be going to no store that Saturday morning if he'd put a spell on Letty so's she'd have to come to him. Ben would be waiting up in his cabin for his spell to work.

Then Joe began to realize that if Ben was a witch it wouldn't do no good to go after him alone, because, leaving out stronger witchery, there's just three things witching can't stand against. One's a purely good heart, and one's a bullet fired across still water, and one's the law and the Grand Jury. So Joe turned and headed back to talk to his granny. If it'd been Sally that had been itching and aching and crying and wringing her hands because Ben Harper'd witched her, Joe wouldn't have turned aside. He'd have gone straight to Ben Harper, and he'd have been raging, and somehow he'd've managed to kill Ben with his own bare hands before any spell could stop him. But this was Letty, so it was different.

The sky didn't look so blue to him, because he didn't see it. He thought about Letty, crying pitiful, and it was because of him that she'd been witched, and he thought about Sally Walker that may be Ben might turn his mind to witch some day.

He went tramping across the pasture and he went past the well. He stomped up on the porch and his eyes were hot and angry, and he went inside—and there was Sally Walker a-setting and talking with his granny. She'd seen him start off to

Crowder's Store from her own folks' cabin up the mountain-side, and she'd come over to visit.

The two of them, Sally and his granny, turned around and stared when Joe came stomping in

He says, furious, "Granny, Letty Smith's been witched!"

Then the words poured out as he told them, raging, all about it. His granny sniffed

"Huh!" she says "When I was a witching woman, before I got religion, I woulda handled this!"

Joe says, "It's on account of me, Granny! He couldn't have witched her, but her heart ain't been right on account of me! She's been hating the girls I courted and she tried witching me to make me dream love dreams of her. She told me And that gave witchery the power over her. I can't let Letty go be a witch's woman on account of me!"

His granny thumped her stick and looked at Sally, a-setting there white and pale and twisting her fingers in her lap as she looked at Joe. Joe's granny says, "I told you he didn't have the sense he was born with!"

But she didn't move to do a thing. And Joe says, fierce, "I know you won't do no witching, Granny. So it looks like I got to get Ben Harper in my sights over still water. And I got to do it right away. I got to, Granny, because it's on account of me!"

His granny says, "What'll the law do? The sheriff don't pay no mind to witchin' They'll hang you, and it'd serve you right for fooling around like you been doing."

"I'll go on a journey, after," says Joe "They won't never catch me. But I'd never sleep nights thinking of Letty as a witch's woman and a-crying in the dark because she couldn't never pass over Jordan. I got to do it, Granny. I got to!"

"I promised," his granny says, peevish, "but Lord knows it's a temptation! Away back before there was any people living in this Hollow and before the ships come across the ocean to this land, the great-grandpappy of my grandpa was foolin' with witchery, and it's in the blood. But I promised—and I ain't cross over Jordan I won't do a thing."

"Then," says Joe, "I'll get my rifle. Nothing else to do."

His granny thumped the floor with her stick. "You, Joe!" she says, angry, "I didn't say I wouldn't tell you what to do

This is a witchin' family, and there's things come down from long ago Up in the attic there's one of them. When I burnt my witchin' things I wouldn't touch it because it couldn't be burnt, and after I got religion I wouldn't touch a witch thing excep' to burn it And it's full of peril. But if your heart is right, you can take it an' fight Ben Harper and he won't never be able to witch nobody any more."

Joe, he says, miserable, "I don't know how right my heart is, but I don't want a thing from Letty, not even a thank you All I want is to be able to sleep nights and not think of somebody cryin' in the dark because they won't never cross over Jordan, and it my fault."

Joe's granny sniffs and says, "Go up in the attic," she says "High up where the bricks get narrow, and make a shelf. All the way in back there's a iron box. It's rusty and it's old. You fetch it here."

Joe went and climbed up to the attic It was crowded with things from past times and long ago. There were boxes with quilts and comforters in them, and a spinning wheel Joe's granny had used when she was a girl, and what might've been a loom There was a old bed, all apart, and a flintlock musket, and all the things that pile up in a attic when folks live in the same house for generations Joe had to step careful, but he got to the chimney, and he reached far back and up high, and he felt a little box all furry with cobwebs Something ran over his fingers when he stirred it, but he brushed the cobwebs off and went back down stairs

"There's a ring in that box," says Joe's granny, grim. "It's rusty because it's iron There's paper in the box hand writ, and there's no use tryin' to read it You go outside and put on the ring Then you can go fight Ben Harper and he can't do a thing to you by his witchin'. If you lick him, he won't never be able to witch no more But I'm warnin' you, don't never let anybody you love see you while you wear that ring!"

Then Sally spoke, for the only time Her voice was shaky, "If he—puts it on—can he cross over Jordan after?"

Joe's granny snuffed "It's outland witchery," she says "My grandma warned me—she that was never happy again

after grandpa saw her wearin' the ring There's witchery that means turnin' your back to the Lord, and your heart has to be black to take pleasure in it. But there's witchery that has to be done with a good heart It's full of peril, because to feel sure your heart is right is presumin' before the Lord. I trust I'm goin' over Jordan, but I know I'm a schemin' old woman and I wouldn't never dare to put on that ring But Joe," she says, "he's bound and determined, and I wouldn't want to see him hung even for shootin' a witch."

She looked at Joe, stern, and he went out of the house The box was iron, with designs on it, and he had to hit it a couple of licks with the axhead before the top opened up reluctant. And there was a ring in it, like his granny had said, and there was paper in it—only it wasn't paper but like rabbit skin with the fur off, and old and dry and yellow He could read the writing, but it was spelled funny and it didn't make sense at all

"By ye arte of alchymie," was what he made out, "I Thomas Dee, Doctor, have made ye ringe of veritie under ye signe of Saturne, but yt ys a sadde discouerie . . ."

Joe didn't try to read any more. He shut up the box and he put the ring on his finger It fitted pretty good.

He didn't feel a mite different until he happened to look down at the ground. Then he was scared.

He shivered a minute and took the ring off fast. But then he thought about Letty all alone and itching and aching and crying because she knew she couldn't hold out forever. So he started off toward Ben Harper's cabin, holding the ring tight.

It wasn't far beyond where Letty lived, and the way was near Tramping through the fallen leaves and pushing aside the bushes, it came to Joe Burchard that Letty'd be strengthened to fight the witchery if she knew his errand. So he turned aside a little and presently there was her folks' cabin on the hillside, with the gray rocks sticking up out of the earth all around. He stepped over the stile and up the sloping pasture, and when he was ten yards from the cabin he hollered.

There wasn't any answer Not a sound but the clucking of the chickens and a bobwhite calling somewhere Joe hollered again.

Still no answer And then the sweat came out on Joe Burchard all over. It was plain enough Letty was toilin' over the hills to Ben Harper, crying and wringing her hands as she went because she couldn't help herself

Joe took out after her He went fast He carried the witch ring in his hand, not on his finger, and he vaulted the rail fence of the pasture, and he went running over the slanting ground, and once he stumbled and went crashing into a dead tree that crumbled to dust when he hit it, and then he knew that witchery was working on him to keep him from catching up to Letty to help her The ring had fallen out of his hand

It took him minutes to find it again, and Lord knows if he'd been thinking anything but good he wouldn't never have found it at all He hunted and hunted desperate, and then he says, agonized, "Lord, help Your servant, because I don't want to do this for myself, being the only girl I purely care about is Sally But I'm the cause of Letty bein' witched—" And there was the witch ring before him, laying on the ground in plain sight He picked it up and put it on his finger and he run.

He flung through brushwood and he flung through briars He climbed up steep ways and he slid down slopes He waded waist-deep in hollows where the leaves had gathered, and he hauled himself up rockfalls by the vines that grew down over them He came to a place where the path led to Ben Harper's cabin He turned into that path and he run

He hadn't gone a quarter of a mile when he saw Letty She was moving along the path with her hands over her face, and she was crying bitter. There was soggings that choked her, and sometimes she took down her hands from her face to wring them. And she was gasping, "I don't want to go . . . I ain't goin' . . . I'm goin' to stop when I get to that bush. . . . I'm a-goin' to set right down here an' not move a step . . ."

But she went right on walking, slow and heavy and leaning back and crying, like somebody trying to walk in a freshet Ben Harper's witching was strong!

Then Joe came up to her, panting, and he says, "Letty!"

And she turned her despairing eyes to him, and she fell down on the path and hid her face. She didn't know him. And Joe remembered that if he was to go near her she'd have a pain in her heart and her breath would stop. There couldn't nobody touch Letty but the one that had witched her. And she didn't know Joe. She lay on the ground, crying and shivering because she'd seen Joe Burchard with the witch ring on his finger, and she took on pitiful. So Joe began to realize how perilous it was to wear this ring, but he went on.

He run on down the path before her, and he brushed through briars and he pushed through brush, and there was Ben Harper's cabin. And Ben Harper sat on the steps before his door.

His eyes glittered and the sunshine seemed to dodge falling on him, and he was a strong, stout man and Joe had put him off to the last to lick, because licking Ben Harper without no witchery would be a hard job. But this was worse. Joe knew right away that he wouldn't have no chance at all without the witch ring.

Ben's eyes were glittering and his mouth was slobbering and he was an awful sight to look at. He'd turned his back on the Lord to have Letty for his own in this life, and he knew she was coming to him. He was waiting for his reward for turning witch, and it was terrible to see. But Joe knew, all of a sudden, that Ben wasn't alone, because right there in his body with him, a-gloating over what Ben thought, a-sharing everything he saw and knew and felt, there was the devil. He was right there in Ben's body, possessing it, and Ben didn't know. But Joe knew, for certain, and he felt almost sorry for Ben. So it was Ben he spoke to.

"Ben," he says, "look at my shadow."

Ben Harper looked—and the devil in his body looked, too. Then he screeched. And then he bounced up and come for Joe like a panther cornered in a henhouse will come for a man that opens the door. The devil in Ben Harper's body knew that he'd got power over any creature that casts a shadow except a man or woman whose heart is right. But he knew, and Ben knew, too, that when somebody that don't cast a shadow stands before him, it's time for the ending of evil and

witchery, too. And with the witch ring on his finger, Joe didn't cast no shadow.

Ben Harper was a big man. He wasn't as tall as Joe, but he was broader. His legs were like tree trunks and his arms were thick with muscle. His eyes glared hate, and his teeth showed like a snarling dog's, and he came panting to fight for his witchery and his meannesses and the pleasures he'd turned witch to have. And the devil stayed in his body to help him. Ben was fighting for Letty, wringing her hands and crying because she couldn't help herself from coming to him. He was fighting for the devil like a preacher fights for the Lord, only he fought with fists and boots and fingers and teeth, biting and gouging and frothing at the mouth because he was fighting for what he'd give up crossing over Jordan for.

And that was a fight! If it wasn't that the witch ring was a good fit on Joe Burchard's finger, Ben woulda got it off and trompled on it, and there would've been nothing left of Joe at all. They fought on the tramped clear space before Ben's cabin door, and they fought in the brush beyond the clearing. They fought into the rail fence around the pigsty, and they knocked it down and they fought in the mud and the mire and the hogs run squealing off into the pine thicket around.

Once Ben got both hands around Joe's throat, and the misty dark shapes all around grew thicker and crowded close. But Joe—with his eyes going black from lack of breath—managed to get hold of just one of Ben's fingers, and he bent it back and broke it, and Ben let go.

And presently they were up, beating at each other with their fists, gasping in each other's faces, and the blows they struck making smacking noises in the stillness that seemed to hold everywhere near by. And Joe felt his knees weakening, and he lurched ahead and gripped Ben around the waist and flung him to the ground, and then he pounded Ben's head on a mite of rock that stuck up out of the ground right there, and he hammered Ben's head on it, and he hammered and he hammered. And Joe must've been mighty dazed by the fight-

ing he'd been through, because he sudden-like heard himself panting, "The Lord is my shepherd—" *Thump!* That was Ben's head on the rock "I shall not want" *Thump!* "He leadeth me beside the still waters—" *Thump!*

And then Ben give a monstrous shudder and lay still.

He wasn't dead, because he was still breathing, but his eyes were closed and his arms were limp and his fingers hung loose and empty There wasn't a quiver in him when Joe got up, panting

He looked all around The sunshine played over everything plain and clear It shone on Ben Harper, and there wasn't any more mistiness anywhere Joe heard the birds singing He heard Ben's hogs gruntng a little way off, so he panted a while and then heaved Ben up off the ground and carried him into the cabin, so as not to leave him laying like dead for the hogs to find And in the cabin he saw Something that the devil must've told Ben Harper to make, and Joe Burchard felt mighty sick at his stomach But he kicked it to pieces and flung it in the fireplace and stirred up the embers to make it burn And then he knew, from what his granny had told him, that Ben Harper couldn't never be a witch again, no matter what he did So he'd better try mighty hard to get religion.

Then Joe went out of the cabin and down the path He saw Letty Smith running away, swarming over fallen logs and running through the brush, with the witching off her so she didn't itch or ache or need to be fearful any more And she was crying still, but it was with joy, and she'd get to somebody's cabin, crying with gladness, and get them to take her quick to a preacher so she could get religion and nevermore be like she'd been

But Joe, he headed back to his granny's It'd been a mighty hard fight. Where he wasn't scratched, he was black and blue Where he wasn't sore, he stung, and where he didn't sting he ached pretty bad And he was all wore out. But he started back for his granny's and there was something that his mind clung to When Letty'd seen him, she cried out and fell down an' hid her face When Ben Harper saw him, he'd screeched and come despairing to fight. And his granny had

said for Joe never to let nobody he cared about see him with the ring on his finger. That was a thing Joe had to find out about being he was twenty-one.

When he came to his granny's cabin, he went past the well. He went up on the porch and he went in the door. And he turned to the mirror that his granny had tacked up on the wall for a proof and a reminder that she'd give up all her witching ways. He looked in that mirror to see what he looked like that he had scared Letty so bad, and made Ben Harper screech and fight. He figured he was going to see something mighty fearful.

But he didn't see a thing. He looked right through his own image and at the wall behind him. He was invisible in the mirror like he didn't cast a shadow in the sun. He stood there, staring at the mirror that didn't show him back at all.

Then his granny says, stern, "You Joe! Take off that there ring! Didn't I tell you not to let nobody see you with it on?"

Joe wrenched it off his finger, and he swallowed. He turned. And there was Sally Walker still setting in the chair where she'd been visiting with his granny. Joe groaned. He stumbled to a chair, and he put his face in his hands and felt like crying while his granny got up and went to get some rags and arnica for the beating he'd got whilst he was licking Ben. And Joe could've cried. He was twenty-one years old and he'd licked every man in a day's walking and he'd fought the devil besides, that day, and he'd won. But Sally Walker'd seen him with the witch ring on his finger and Joe didn't see any good in anything.

Then she said soft and anxious in his ear, "Joe, do you hurt bad anywheres?"

He jumped. He looked at her and she didn't look scared of him. She looked worried, but that was all. And Joe felt so good at seeing that, he went plain out of his head.

His granny's stick, thumping on the floor, brought him back to where he was and made him stop what he was doing.

"Huh!" says his granny, snuffing. "Now you licked every man in a day's walking and kissed every girl but one! Now what're you goin' to do?"

And Joe Burchard grinned like his throat would split, and he didn't mind the hurt at all. He held Sally Walker close and

he says, "Granny, I reckon I'm going to settle down an' get married."

And he did. And it was a long time before he learned any more about the witch ring. His granny wouldn't talk about it, and Sally didn't know, but it stayed in Joe's mind. And one day his granny took sick and she looked triumphant because she'd kept her promise to Joe's grandpa and to the Lord, and she knew she'd be going over Jordan. So she lay in her bed, and Joe says

"Granny," he says, "if you don't tell me I'll never know, and till I know I'll fret. When I was wearing that witch ring I scared Letty Smith and I scared Ben Harper, but when I looked in that mirror I looked right through my image and I couldn't see myself at all. How come?"

His granny grinned at him, laying there in the bed, waiting to pass over Jordan.

"Huh!" she says. "That ring is perilous, honey, because it makes folks see you like you really are. That's what Letty and Ben Harper saw. But no man can't never see himself like he really is, so you couldn't see a dawgoned thing!"

And Joe, he thought it over, and he says, "But you and Sally, you saw me with the witch ring on! You saw me like I really was, and it didn't scare neither of you."

But his granny just sniffed at him, while she looked at him soft—just as soft as Sally ever did. And she says, "You won't understand, honey. But we was two women that purely loved you. So it didn't matter a bit."

And Joe's granny was right. He didn't understand. Never till the day he died.

Lost Hearts

It was, as far as I can ascertain, in September of the year 1811 that a post-chaise drew up before the door of Aswarby Hall, in the heart of Lincolnshire. The little boy who was the only passenger in the chaise, and who jumped out as soon as it had stopped, looked about him with the keenest curiosity during the short interval that elapsed between the ringing of the bell and the opening of the hall door. He saw a tall, square, red-brick house, built in the reign of Anne, a stone-pillared porch had been added in the purer classical style of 1790, the windows of the house were many, tall and narrow, with small panes and thick white woodwork. A pediment, pierced with a round window, crowned the front. There were wings to right and left, connected by curious glazed galleries, supported by colonnades, with the central block. These wings plainly contained the stables and offices of the house. Each was surmounted by an ornamental cupola with a gilded vane.

An evening light shone on the building, making the windowpanes glow like so many fires. Away from the Hall in front stretched a flat park studded with oaks and fringed with firs, which stood out against the sky. The clock in the church-tower, buried in trees on the edge of the park, only its golden weathercock catching the light, was striking six, and the sound came gently beating down the wind. It was altogether a pleasant impression, though tinged with the sort of melancholy appropriate to an evening in early autumn, that was conveyed to the mind of the boy who was standing in the porch waiting for the door to open to him.

The post-chaise had brought him from Warwickshire, where, some six months before, he had been left an orphan. Now, owing to the generous offer of his elderly cousin, Mr. Abney, he had come to live at Aswarby. The offer was unexpected, because all who knew anything of Mr. Abney

looked upon him as a somewhat austere recluse, into whose steady-going household the advent of a small boy would import a new and, it seemed, incongruous element. The truth is that very little was known of Mr Abney's pursuits or temper. The Professor of Greek at Cambridge had been heard to say that no one knew more of the religious beliefs of the later pagans than did the owner of Aswarby. Certainly his library contained all the then available books bearing on the Mysteries, the Orphic poems, the worship of Mithras, and the Neo-Platonists. In the marble-paved hall stood a fine group of Mithras slaying a bull, which had been imported from the Levant at great expense by the owner. He had contributed a description of it to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and he had written a remarkable series of articles in the *Critical Museum* on the superstitions of the Romans of the Lower Empire. He was looked upon, in fine, as a man wrapped up in his books, and it was a matter of great surprise among his neighbours that he should even have heard of his orphan cousin, Stephen Elliott, much more that he should have volunteered to make him an inmate of Aswarby Hall.

Whatever may have been expected by his neighbours, it is certain that Mr Abney—the tall, the thin, the austere—seemed inclined to give his young cousin a kindly reception. The moment the front door was opened he darted out of his study, rubbing his hands with delight.

"How are you, my boy?—how are you? How old are you?" said he—"that is, you are not too much tired, I hope, by your journey to eat your supper?"

"No, thank you, sir," said Master Elliott, "I am pretty well."

"That's a good lad," said Mr Abney. "And how old are you, my boy?"

It seemed a little odd that he should have asked the question twice in the first two minutes of their acquaintance.

"I'm twelve years old next birthday, sir," said Stephen.

"And when is your birthday, my dear boy? Eleventh of September, eh? That's well—that's very well. Nearly a year hence, isn't it? I like—ha, ha!—I like to get these things down in my book. Sure it's twelve? Certain?"

"Yes, quite sure, sir."

"Well, well! Take him to Mrs Bunch's room, Parkes, and let him have his tea—supper—whatever it is"

"Yes, sir," answered the staid Mr. Parkes, and conducted Stephen to the lower regions

Mrs Bunch was the most comfortable and human person whom Stephen had as yet met in Aswarby. She made him completely at home, they were great friends in a quarter of an hour and great friends they remained. Mrs Bunch had been born in the neighbourhood some fifty-five years before the date of Stephen's arrival, and her residence at the Hall was of twenty years' standing. Consequently, if anyone knew the ins and outs of the house and the district, Mrs Bunch knew them, and she was by no means disinclined to communicate her information.

Certainly there were plenty of things about the Hall and the Hall gardens which Stephen, who was of an adventurous and inquiring turn, was anxious to have explained to him. "Who built the temple at the end of the laurel walk? Who was the old man whose picture hung on the staircase, sitting at a table, with a skull under his hand?" These and many similar points were cleared up by the resources of Mrs Bunch's powerful intellect. There were others, however, of which the explanations furnished were less satisfactory.

One November evening Stephen was sitting by the fire in the housekeeper's room reflecting on his surroundings.

"Is Mr Abney a good man, and will he go to heaven?" he suddenly asked, with the peculiar confidence which children possess in the ability of their elders to settle these questions, the decision of which is believed to be reserved for other tribunals.

"Good?—bless the child!" said Mrs Bunch. "Master's as kind a soul as ever I see! Didn't I never tell you of the little boy as he took in out of the street, as you may say, this seven years back? and the little girl, two years after I first come here?"

"No Do tell me all about them, Mrs Bunch—now this minute!"

"Well," said Mrs Bunch, "the little girl I don't seem to recollect so much about I know master brought her back

with him from his walk one day, and give orders to Mrs Ellis, as was housekeeper then, as she should be took every care with. And the pore child hadn't no one belonging to her—she telled me so her own self—and here she lived with us a matter of three weeks it might be, and then, whether she were somethink of a gipsy in her blood or what not, but one morning she out of her bed afore any of us had opened a eye, and neither track nor yet trace of her have I set eyes on since Master was wonderful put about, and had all the ponds dragged, but it's my belief she was had away by them gipsies, for there was singing round the house for as much as an hour the night she went, and Parkes, he declare as he heard them a-calling in the woods all that afternoon. Dear, dear! a hodd child she was, so silent in her ways and all, but I was wonderful taken up with her, so domesticated she was—surprising ”

“And what about the little boy?” said Stephen.

“Ah, that pore boy!” sighed Mrs Bunch. “He were a foreigner—Jevanny he called hisself—and he come a-tweaking his 'urdy-gurdy round and about the drive one winter day, and master 'ad him in that minute, and ast all about where he came from, and how old he was, and how he made his way, and where was his relatives, and all as kind as heart could wish But it went the same way with him. They're a hunruly lot, them foreign nations, I do suppose, and he was off one fine morning just the same as the girl Why he went and what he done was our question for as much as a year after, for he never took his 'urdy-gurdy, and there it lays on the shelf ”

The remainder of the evening was spent by Stephen in miscellaneous cross-examination of Mrs Bunch and in efforts to extract a tune from the hurdy-gurdy.

That night he had a curious dream At the end of the passage at the top of the house, in which his bedroom was situated, there was an old disused bathroom. It was kept locked, but the upper half of the door was glazed, and, since the muslin curtains which used to hang there had long been gone, you could look in and see the lead-lined bath affixed to the wall on the right hand, with its head towards the window

On the night of which I am speaking, Stephen Elliott found himself, as he thought, looking through the glazed door

The moon was shining through the window, and he was gazing at a figure which lay in the bath

His description of what he saw reminds me of what I once beheld myself in the famous vaults of St. Michan's Church in Dublin, which possess the horrid property of preserving corpses from decay for centuries. A figure inexpressibly thin and pathetic, of a dusty leaden colour, enveloped in a shroud-like garment, the thin lips crooked into a faint and dreadful smile, the hands pressed tightly over the region of the heart.

As he looked upon it, a distant, almost inaudible moan seemed to issue from its lips, and the arms began to stir. The terror of the sight forced Stephen backwards, and he awoke to the fact that he was indeed standing on the cold boarded floor of the passage in the full light of the moon. With a courage which I do not think can be common among boys of his age, he went to the door of the bathroom to ascertain if the figure of his dream were really there. It was not, and he went back to bed.

Mrs. Bunch was much impressed next morning by his story, and went so far as to replace the muslin curtain over the glazed door of the bathroom. Mr. Abney, moreover, to whom he confided his experiences at breakfast, was greatly interested, and made notes of the matter in what he called "his book."

The spring equinox was approaching, as Mr. Abney frequently reminded his cousin, adding that this had been always considered by the ancients to be a critical time for the young that Stephen would do well to take care of himself, and to shut his bedroom window at night, and that Censorinus had some valuable remarks on the subject. Two incidents that occurred about this time made an impression upon Stephen's mind.

The first was after an unusually uneasy and oppressed night that he had passed—though he could not recall any particular dream that he had had.

The following evening Mrs. Bunch was occupying herself in mending his nightgown.

"Gracious me, Master Stephen!" she broke forth rather irritably, "how do you manage to tear your nightdress all to

flinders this way? Look here, sir, what trouble you do give to poor servants that have to darn and mend after you!"

There was indeed a most destructive and apparently wanton series of slits or scorings in the garment, which would undoubtedly require a skilful needle to make good. They were confined to the left side of the chest—long, parallel slits, about six inches in length, some of them not quite piercing the texture of the linen. Stephen could only express his entire ignorance of their origin—he was sure they were not there the night before.

"But," he said, "Mrs Bunch, they are just the same as the scratches on the outside of my bedroom door, and I'm sure I never had anything to do with making *them*."

Mrs Bunch gazed at him open-mouthed, then snatched up a candle, departed hastily from the room, and was heard making her way upstairs. In a few minutes she came down.

"Well," she said, "Master Stephen, it's a funny thing to me how them marks and scratches can 'a' come there—too high up for any cat or dog to 'ave made 'em, much less a rat for all the world like a Chinaman's finger-nails, as my uncle in the tea-trade used to tell us of when we was girls together. I wouldn't say nothing to master, not if I was you, Master Stephen, my dear, and just turn the key of the door when you go to your bed."

"I always do, Mrs Bunch, as soon as I've said my prayers."

"Ah, that's a good child—always say your prayers, and then no one can't hurt you."

Herewith Mrs Bunch addressed herself to mending the injured nightgown, with intervals of meditation, until bed-time. This was on a Friday night in March, 1812.

On the following evening the usual duet of Stephen and Mrs Bunch was augmented by the sudden arrival of Mr. Parkes, the butler, who as a rule kept himself rather to himself in his own pantry. He did not see that Stephen was there—he was, moreover, flustered, and less slow of speech than was his wont.

"Master may get up his own wine, if he likes, of an evening," was his first remark. "Either I do it in the daytime or not at all, Mrs Bunch I don't know what it may be. very

like it's the rats, or the wind got into the cellars, but I'm not so young as I was, and I can't go through with it as I have done."

"Well, Mr Parkes, you know it is a surprising place for the rats, is the Hall "

"I'm not denying that, Mrs Bunch, and, to be sure, many a time I've heard the tale from the men in the shipyards about the rat that could speak I never laid no confidence in that before, but to-night, if I'd demeaned myself to lay my ear to the door of the further bin, I could pretty much have heard what they was saying "

"Oh, there, Mr Parkes, I've no patience with your fancies! Rats talking in the wine-cellar indeed!"

"Well, Mrs Bunch, I've no wish to argue with you all I say is, if you choose to go to the far bin, and lay your ear to the door, you may prove my words this minute "

"What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Parkes—not fit for children to listen to! Why, you'll be frightening Master Stephen there out of his wits "

"What! Master Stephen?" said Parkes, awaking to the consciousness of the boy's presence. "Master Stephen knows well enough when I'm a-playing a joke with you, Mrs Bunch."

In fact, Master Stephen knew much too well to suppose that Mr Parkes had in the first instance intended a joke. He was interested, not altogether pleasantly, in the situation; but all his questions were unsuccessful in inducing the butler to give any more detailed account of his experiences in the wine-cellar.

We have now arrived at March 24, 1812. It was a day of curious experiences for Stephen. a windy, noisy day, which filled the house and the gardens with a restless impression. As Stephen stood by the fence of the grounds, and looked out into the park, he felt as if an endless procession of unseen people were sweeping past him on the wind, borne on resistlessly and aimlessly, vainly striving to stop themselves, to catch at something that might arrest their flight and bring them once again into contact with the living world of which they had formed a part. After luncheon that day Mr. Abney said

"Stephen, my boy, do you think you could manage to come to me to-night as late as eleven o'clock in my study? I shall be busy until that time, and I wish to show you something connected with your future life which it is most important that you should know. You are not to mention this matter to Mrs Bunch nor to anyone else in the house, and you had better go to your room at the usual time."

Here was a new excitement added to life. Stephen eagerly grasped at the opportunity of sitting up till eleven o'clock. He looked in at the library door on his way upstairs that evening, and saw a brazier, which he had often noticed in the corner of the room, moved out before the fire, an old silver-gilt cup stood on the table, filled with red wine, and some written sheets of paper lay near it. Mr Abney was sprinkling some incense on the brazier from a round silver box as Stephen passed, but did not seem to notice his step.

The wind had fallen, and there was a still night and a full moon. At about ten o'clock Stephen was standing at the open window of his bedroom, looking out over the country. Still as the night was, the mysterious population of the distant moonlit woods was not yet lulled to rest. From time to time strange cries as of lost and despairing wanderers sounded from across the mere. They might be the notes of owls or water-birds, yet they did not quite resemble either sound. Were not they coming nearer? Now they sounded from the nearer side of the water, and in a few moments they seemed to be floating about among the shrubberies. Then they ceased; but just as Stephen was thinking of shutting the window and resuming his reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, he caught sight of two figures standing on the gravelled terrace that ran along the garden side of the Hall—the figures of a boy and girl, as it seemed, they stood side by side, looking up at the windows. Something in the form of the girl recalled irresistibly his dream of the figure in the bath. The boy inspired him with more acute fear.

Whilst the girl stood still, half smiling, with her hands clasped over her heart, the boy, a thin shape, with black hair and ragged clothing, raised his arms in the air with an appearance of menace and of unappeasable hunger and longing. The moon shone upon his almost transparent hands, and

Stephen saw that the nails were fearfully long and that the light shone through them As he stood with his arms thus raised, he disclosed a terrifying spectacle On the left side of his chest there opened a black and gaping rent, and there fell upon Stephen's brain, rather than upon his ear, the impression of one of those hungry and desolate cries that he had heard resounding over the woods of Aswarby all that evening In another moment this dreadful pair had moved swiftly and noiselessly over the dry gravel, and he saw them no more

Inexpressibly frightened as he was, he determined to take his candle and go down to Mr Abney's study, for the hour appointed for their meeting was near at hand The study or library opened out of the front hall on one side, and Stephen, urged on by his terrors, did not take long in getting there To effect an entrance was not so easy The door was not locked, he felt sure, for the key was on the outside of it as usual His repeated knocks produced no answer Mr Abney was engaged he was speaking What! why did he try to cry out? and why was the cry choked in his throat? Had he, too, seen the mysterious children? But now everything was quiet, and the door yielded to Stephen's terrified and frantic pushing

On the table in Mr Abney's study certain papers were found which explained the situation to Stephen Elliott when he was of an age to understand them. The most important sentences were as follows:

"It was a belief very strongly and generally held by the ancients—of whose wisdom in these matters I have had such experience as induces me to place confidence in their assertions—that by enacting certain processes, which to us moderns have something of a barbaric complexion, a very remarkable enlightenment of the spiritual faculties in man may be attained that, for example, by absorbing the personalities of a certain number of his fellow-creatures, an individual may gain a complete ascendancy over those orders of spiritual beings which control the elemental forces of our universe

"It is recorded of Simon Magus that he was able to fly in the air, to become invisible, or to assume any form he pleased, by the agency of the soul of a boy whom, to use the libelous

phrase employed by the author of the *Clementine Recognitions*, he had 'murdered' I find it set down, moreover, with considerable detail in the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, that similar happy results may be produced by the absorption of the hearts of not less than three human beings below the age of twenty-one years To the testing of the truth of this receipt I have devoted the greater part of the last twenty years, selecting as the *corpora vilia* of my experiment such persons as could conveniently be removed without occasioning a sensible gap in society The first step I effected by the removal of one Phoebe Stanley, a girl of gipsy extraction, on March 24, 1792 The second, by the removal of a wandering Italian lad, named Giovanni Paoli, on the night of March 23, 1805 The final 'victim'—to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings—must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott His day must be this March 24, 1812

"The best means of effecting the required absorption is to remove the heart from the *living* subject, to reduce it to ashes, and to mingle them with about a pint of some red wine, preferably port The remains of the first two subjects, at least, it will be well to conceal a disused bathroom or wine-cellar will be found convenient for such a purpose Some annoyance may be experienced from the psychic portion of the subjects, which popular language dignifies with the name of ghosts But the man of philosophic temperament—to whom alone the experiment is appropriate—will be little prone to attach importance to the feeble efforts of these beings to wreak their vengeance on him I contemplate with the liveliest satisfaction the enlarged and emancipated existence which the experiment, if successful, will confer on me, not only placing me beyond the reach of human justice (so-called), but eliminating to a great extent the prospect of death itself"

Mr Abney was found in his chair, his head thrown back, his face stamped with an expression of rage, fright, and mortal pain In his left side was a terrible lacerated wound, exposing the heart There was no blood on his hands, and a long knife that lay on the table was perfectly clean A savage

wild-cat might have inflicted the injuries. The window of the study was open, and it was the opinion of the coroner that Mr. Abney had met his death by the agency of some wild creature. But Stephen Elliott's study of the papers I have quoted led him to a very different conclusion.

Thirteen at Table

In front of a spacious fireplace of the old kind, when the logs were well alight, and men with pipes and glasses were gathered before it in great easyful chairs, and the wild weather outside and the comfort that was within, and the season of the year—for it was Christmas—and the hour of the night, all called for the weird or uncanny, then out spoke the ex-master of foxhounds and told this tale

"I once had an odd experience too. It was when I had the Bromley and Sydenham, the year I gave them up—as a matter of fact it was the last day of the season. It was no use going on because there were no foxes left in the country, and London was sweeping down on us. You could see it from the kennels all along the skyline like a terrible army in grey, and masses of villas every year came skirmishing down our valleys. Our coverts were mostly on the hills, and as the town came down upon the valleys the foxes used to leave them and go right away out of the country, and they never returned. I think they went by night and moved great distances. Well, it was early April and we had drawn blank all day, and at the last draw of all, the very last of the season, we found a fox. He left the covert with his back to London and its railways and villas and wire, and slipped away towards the chalk country and open Kent. I felt as I once felt as a child on one summer's day when I found a door in a garden where I played left luckily ajar, and I pushed it open and the wide lands were before me and waving fields of corn

"We settled down into a steady gallop and the fields began to drift by under us, and a great wind arose full of fresh breath. We left the clay lands where the bracken grows and came to a valley at the edge of the chalk. As we went down into it we saw the fox go up the other side like a shadow that crosses the evening, and glide into a wood that stood on

the top We saw a flash of primroses in the wood and we were out the other side, hounds hunting perfectly and the fox still going absolutely straight It began to dawn on me then that we were in for a great hunt; I took a deep breath when I thought of it, the taste of the air of that perfect spring afternoon as it came to one galloping, and the thought of a great run, were together like some old rare wine. Our faces now were to another valley, large fields led down to it with easy hedges, at the bottom of it a bright blue stream went singing and a rambling village smoked, the sunlight on the opposite slopes danced like a fairy, and all along the top old woods were frowning, but they dreamed of spring. The field had fallen off and were far behind and my only human companion was James, my old first whip, who had a hound's instinct, and a personal animosity against a fox that even embittered his speech

"Across the valley the fox went as straight as a railway line, and again we went without a check straight through the woods at the top I remember hearing men sing or shout as they walked home from work, and sometimes children whistled, the sounds came up from the village to the woods at the top of the valley. After that we saw no more villages, but valley after valley arose and fell before us as though we were voyaging some strange and stormy sea, and all the way before us the fox went dead up-wind like the fabulous flying Dutchman There was no one in sight now but my first whip and me, we had both of us got on to our second horses as we drew the last covert Two or three times we checked in those great lonely valleys beyond the village, but I began to have inspirations, I felt a strange certainty within me that this fox was going on straight up-wind till he died or until night came and we could hunt no longer, so I reversed ordinary methods and only cast straight-ahead, and always we picked up the scent again at once I believe that this fox was the last one left in the villa-haunted lands and that he was prepared to leave them for remote uplands far from men, that if we had come the following day he would not have been there, and that we just happened to hit off his journey

"Evening began to descend upon the valleys, still the hounds drifted on, like the lazy but unresting shadows of clouds

upon a summer's day, we heard a shepherd calling to his dog, we saw two maidens move toward a hidden farm, one of them singing softly, no other sounds but ours disturbed the leisure and the loneliness of haunts that seemed not yet to have known the inventions of steam and gunpowder

"And now the day and our horses were wearing out, but that resolute fox held on I began to work out the run and to wonder where we were The last landmark I had ever seen before must have been over five miles back, and from there to the start was at least ten miles more If only we could kill! Then the sun set I wondered what chance we had of killing our fox. I looked at James' face as he rode beside me He did not seem to have lost any confidence, yet his horse was as tired as mine It was a good clear twilight and the scent was as strong as ever, and the fences were easy enough, but those valleys were terribly trying, and they still rolled on and on. It looked as if the light would outlast all possible endurance both of the fox and the horses, if the scent held good and he did not go to ground, otherwise night would end it. For long we had seen no houses and no roads, only chalk slopes with the twilight on them, and here and there some sheep, and scattered copses darkening in the evening At some moment I seemed to realize all at once that the light was spent and that darkness was hovering I looked at James, he was solemnly shaking his head Suddenly in a little wooded valley we saw climb over the oaks the red-brown gables of a queer old house, at that instant I saw the fox scarcely leading by fifty yards We blundered through a wood into full sight of the house, but no avenue led up to it or even a path, nor were there any signs of wheelmarks anywhere Already lights shone here and there in windows We were in a park, and a fine park, but unkempt beyond credibility, brambles grew everywhere It was too dark to see the fox any more, but we knew he was dead beat, the hounds were just before us—and a four-foot railing of oak I shouldn't have tried it on a fresh horse at the beginning of a run, and here was a horse near his last gasp, but what a run! an event standing out in a lifetime, and the hounds, close up on their fox, slipping into the darkness as I hesitated I decided to try it My horse rose about eight inches and took it

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"Evening began to descend upon the valleys, still the hounds drifted on, like the lazy but unresting shadows of clouds

upon a summer's day, we heard a shepherd calling to his dog, we saw two maidens move toward a hidden farm, one of them singing softly, no other sounds but ours disturbed the leisure and the loneliness of haunts that seemed not yet to have known the inventions of steam and gunpowder

"And now the day and our horses were wearing out, but that resolute fox held on I began to work out the run and to wonder where we were The last landmark I had ever seen before must have been over five miles back, and from there to the start was at least ten miles more If only we could kill! Then the sun set I wondered what chance we had of killing our fox I looked at James' face as he rode beside me He did not seem to have lost any confidence, yet his horse was as tired as mine It was a good clear twilight and the scent was as strong as ever, and the fences were easy enough, but those valleys were terribly trying, and they still rolled on and on It looked as if the light would outlast all possible endurance both of the fox and the horses, if the scent held good and he did not go to ground, otherwise night would end it. For long we had seen no houses and no roads, only chalk slopes with the twilight on them, and here and there some sheep, and scattered copses darkening in the evening At some moment I seemed to realize all at once that the light was spent and that darkness was hovering I looked at James, he was solemnly shaking his head Suddenly in a little wooded valley we saw climb over the oaks the red-brown gables of a queer old house, at that instant I saw the fox scarcely leading by fifty yards We blundered through a wood into full sight of the house, but no avenue led up to it or even a path, nor were there any signs of wheelmarks anywhere Already lights shone here and there in windows We were in a park, and a fine park, but unkempt beyond credibility, brambles grew everywhere It was too dark to see the fox any more, but we knew he was dead beat, the hounds were just before us—and a four-foot railing of oak I shouldn't have tried it on a fresh horse at the beginning of a run, and here was a horse near his last gasp, but what a run! an event standing out in a lifetime, and the hounds, close up on their fox, slipping into the darkness as I hesitated I decided to try it. My horse rose about eight inches and took it

fair with his breast, and the oak log flew into handfuls of wet decay,—it was rotten with years. And then we were on a lawn, and at the far end of it the hounds were tumbling over their fox. Fox, horses, and light were all done together at the end of a twenty-mile point. We made some noise then, but nobody came out of the queer old house.

"I felt pretty stiff as I walked round to the hall door with the mask and the brush, while James went with the hounds and the two horses to look for the stables. I rang a bell marvellously encrusted with rust, and after a long while the door opened a little way, revealing a hall with much old armour in it and the shabbiest butler that I have ever known.

"I asked him who lived there Sir Richard Arlen. I explained that my horse could go no further that night, and that I wished to ask Sir Richard Arlen for a bed.

"'O, no one ever comes here, sir,' said the butler.

"I pointed out that I had come.

"'I don't think it would be possible, sir,' he said.

"This annoyed me, and I asked to see Sir Richard, and insisted until he came. Then I apologized and explained the situation. He looked only fifty, but a 'Varsity oar on the wall with the date of the early seventies made him older than that, his face had something of the shy look of the hermit, he regretted that he had not room to put me up. I was sure that this was untrue, also I had to be put up there, there was nowhere else within miles, so I almost insisted. Then, to my astonishment, he turned to the butler and they talked it over in an undertone. At last they seemed to think that they could manage it, though clearly with reluctance. It was by now seven o'clock, and Sir Richard told me he dined at half-past seven. There was no question of clothes for me other than those I stood in, as my host was shorter and broader. He showed me presently to the drawing-room, and then he reappeared before half-past seven in evening dress and a white waistcoat. The drawing-room was large and contained old furniture, but it was rather worn than venerable; an Aubusson carpet flapped about the floor, the wind seemed momently to enter the room, and old draughts haunted corners, stealthy feet of rats that were never at rest indicated the extent of the ruin that time had wrought in the wainscot,

somewhere far off a shutter flapped to and fro, the guttering candles were insufficient to light so large a room The gloom that these things suggested was quite in keeping with Sir Richard's first remark to me after he entered the room

" 'I must tell you, sir, that I have led a wicked life O, a very wicked life '

"Such confidences from a man much older than oneself after one has known him for half an hour are so rare that any possible answer merely does not suggest itself I said rather slowly, 'O, really,' and chiefly to forestall another such remark, I said, 'What a charming house you have '

" 'Yes,' he said, 'I have not left it for nearly forty years Since I left the 'Varsity One is young there, you know, and one has opportunities, but I make no excuses, no excuses' And the door slipping its rusty latch, came drifting on the draught into the room, and the long carpet flapped and the hangings upon the walls, then the draught fell rustling away and the door slammed to again

" 'Ah, Marianne,' he said 'We have a guest to-night Mr Linton This is Marianne Gib' And everything became clear to me 'Mad,' I said to myself, for no one had entered the room

"The rats ran up the length of the room behind the wainscot ceaselessly, and the wind unlatched the door again and the folds of the carpet fluttered up to our feet and stopped there, for our weight held it down

" 'Let me introduce Mr Linton,' said my host 'Lady Mary Erringer'

"The door slammed back again I bowed politely Even had I been invited I should have humoured him, but it was the very least that an uninvited guest could do

"This kind of thing happened eleven times the rustling, and the fluttering of the carpet, and the footsteps of the rats, and the restless door, and then the sad voice of my host introducing me to phantoms Then for some while we waited while I struggled with the situation, conversation flowed slowly And again the draught came trailing up the room, while the flaring candles filled it with hurrying shadows 'Ah, late again, Cicely,' said my host in his soft mournful way 'Always late, Cicely' Then I went down to dinner with that

man and his mind and the twelve phantoms that haunted it. I found a long table with fine old silver on it, and places laid for fourteen. The butler was now in evening dress, there were fewer draughts in the dining-room, the scene was less gloomy there 'Will you sit next to Rosalind at the other end?' Sir Richard said to me 'She always takes the head of the table I wronged her most of all'

"I said, 'I shall be delighted'

"I looked at the butler closely, but never did I see by any expression of his face, or by anything that he did, any suggestion that he waited upon less than fourteen people in the complete possession of all their faculties. Perhaps a dish appeared to be refused more often than taken, but every glass was equally filled with champagne. At first I found little to say, but when Sir Richard, speaking from the far end of the table, said 'You are tired, Mr. Linton?' I was reminded that I owed something to a host upon whom I had forced myself. It was excellent champagne, and with the help of a second glass I made the effort to begin a conversation with a Miss Helen Errold, for whom the place upon one side of me was laid. It came more easy to me very soon, I frequently paused in my monologue, like Mark Antony, for a reply, and sometimes I turned and spoke to Miss Rosalind Smith. Sir Richard at the other end talked sorrowfully on, he spoke as a condemned man might speak to his judge, and yet somewhat as a judge might speak to one that he once condemned wrongly. My own mind began to turn to mournful things. I drank another glass of champagne, but I was still thirsty. I felt as if all the moisture in my body had been blown away over the downs of Kent by the wind up which we had galloped. Still I was not talking enough my host was looking at me. I made another effort, after all I had something to talk about a twenty-mile point is not often seen in a lifetime, especially south of the Thames. I began to describe the run to Rosalind Smith. I could see then that my host was pleased, the sad look in his face gave a kind of a flicker, like mist upon the mountains on a miserable day when a faint puff comes from the sea and the mist would lift if it could. And the butler refilled my glass very attentively. I asked her first if she hunted, and paused and began my story. I told her

where we found the fox and how fast and straight he had gone, and how I had got through the village by keeping to the road, while the little gardens and wire, and then the river, had stopped the rest of the field I told her the kind of country that we crossed and how splendid it looked in the spring, and how mysterious the valleys were as soon as the twilight came, and what a glorious horse I had and how wonderfully he went.

"I was so fearfully thirsty after the great hunt that I had to stop for a moment now and then, but I went on with my description of that famous run, for I had warmed to the subject, and after all there was nobody to tell of it but me except my old whipper-in, and 'the old fellow's probably drunk by now' I thought. I described to her minutely the exact spot in the run at which it had come to me clearly that this was going to be the greatest hunt in the whole history of Kent. Sometimes I forgot incidents that had happened, as one well may in a run of twenty miles, and then I had to fill in the gaps by inventing I was pleased to be able to make the party go off well by means of my conversation, and besides that the lady to whom I was speaking was extremely pretty I do not mean in a flesh-and-blood kind of way, but there were little shadowy lines about the chair beside me that hinted at an unusually graceful figure when Miss Rosalind Smith was alive, and I began to perceive that what I first mistook for the smoke of guttering candles and a table-cloth waving in the draught was in reality an extremely animated company who listened, and not without interest, to my story of by far the greatest hunt that the world had ever known indeed, I told them that I would confidently go further and predict that never in the history of the world would there be such a run again Only my throat was terribly dry

"And then, as it seemed, they wanted to hear more about my horse I had forgotten that I had come there on a horse, but when they reminded me it all came back, they looked so charming leaning over the table, intent upon what I said, that I told them everything they wanted to know Everything was going so pleasantly if only Sir Richard would cheer up I heard his mournful voice every now and then—these were very pleasant people if only he would take them the right

way I could understand that he regretted his past, but the early seventies seemed centuries away, and I felt now that he misunderstood these ladies, they were not revengeful as he seemed to suppose I wanted to show him how cheerful they really were, and so I made a joke and they all laughed at it, and then I chaffed them a bit, especially Rosalind, and nobody resented it in the very least And still Sir Richard sat there with that unhappy look, like one that has ended weeping because it is vain and has not the consolation even of tears

"We had been a long time there, and many of the candles had burned out, but there was light enough I was glad to have an audience for my exploit, and being happy myself I was determined Sir Richard should be I made more jokes and they still laughed good-naturedly, some of the jokes were a little broad perhaps, but no harm was meant And they,—I do not wish to excuse myself, but I had had a harder day than I ever had had before, and without knowing it I must have been completely exhausted, in this state the champagne had found me, and what would have been harmless at any other time must somehow have got the better of me when quite tired out. Anyhow, I went too far, I made some joke,—I cannot in the least remember what,—that suddenly seemed to offend them I felt all at once a commotion in the air, I looked up and saw that they had all risen from the table and were sweeping towards the door I had not time to open it, but it blew open on a wind, I could scarcely see what Sir Richard was doing because only two candles were left, I think the rest blew out when the ladies suddenly rose I sprang up to apologize, to assure them—and then fatigue overcame me as it had overcome my horse at the last fence, I clutched at the table, but the cloth came away, and then I fell The fall, and the darkness on the floor, and the pent-up fatigue of the day overcame me all three together

"The sun shone over glittering fields and in at a bedroom window, and thousands of birds were chaunting to the spring, and there I was in an old four-poster bed in a quaint old panelled bedroom, fully dressed, and wearing long muddy boots, someone had taken my spurs and that was all For a moment I failed to realize, and then it all came back—my

enormity and the pressing need of an abject apology to Sir Richard I pulled an embroidered bell-rope until the butler came, he came in perfectly cheerful and indescribably shabby I asked him if Sir Richard was up, and he said he had just gone down, and told me to my amazement that it was twelve o'clock I asked to be shown in to Sir Richard at once

"He was in his smoking-room 'Good morning' he said cheerfully the moment I went in I went directly to the matter in hand 'I fear that I insulted some ladies in your house ' I began.

" 'You did indeed,' he said 'You did indeed' And then he burst into tears, and took me by the hand 'How can I ever thank you?' he said to me then 'We have been thirteen at table for thirty years, and I never dared to insult them because I had wronged them all, and now you have done it, and I know they will never dine here again' And for a long time he still held my hand, and then he gave it a grip and a kind of a shake which I took to mean 'good-bye,' and I drew my hand away then and left the house And I found James in the disused stables with the hounds and asked him how he had fared, and James, who is a man of very few words, said he could not rightly remember, and I got my spurs from the butler and climbed on to my horse, and slowly we rode away from that queer old house, and slowly we wended home, for the hounds were footsore but happy and the horses were tred still And when we recalled that the hunting season was ended, we turned our faces to spring and thought of the new things that try to replace the old And that very year I heard, and have often heard since, of dances and happier dinners at Sir Richard Arlen's house "

Philip Fisher

Lights

I

There had never been any question of Carey's seamanship. Officers who knew had testified to that. The captain himself had declared so to the court. And he had added further the unsolicited opinion that he knew no officer he would more fully trust to keep safe position when the destroyer division was making twenty-five knots in close column.

Furtive glances flickered between the officers grouped about the green-baized wardroom table. A disagreeable duty, this trying a brother-at-arms. The judge advocate himself hesitated. Then, pushing aside a thought not entirely complimentary to naval regulations, he sighed almost audibly and put another question.

Captain Kennart shook his head with grim decision.

"No," he said emphatically. "Carey never used the stadiometer. Always judged the distance with his naked eye."

A member of the court cleared his throat. Another tapped the table top with his pencil. The judge advocate sighed within himself again.

"That's all," he said finally.

Carey's counsel nodded. The president of the court looked inquiringly at his confrères. Each shook his head in turn.

The president made the routine admonition regarding silence and Captain Kennart left the room.

Lieutenant, junior grade, Warren Carey relaxed somewhat in his seat. He had felt that his captain would do his best by him. He thrilled with a growing faith in his fellow man at this positive evidence that despite what had occurred the captain bore no grudge. Yet had Captain Kennart given testimony inspired by an active hate, he could have found no fault.

Hope again grew in his breast. These officers about him, too, he had shopped and partied with all over the China coast. The admiral had ordered them on this court A regulation duty They were to ascertain facts, impartially weigh them, give judgment in accordance with navy law This they would do, Carey knew. Yet when one's fate is to be settled by real men, mercy ever tempers justice. Real men can understand

A fluttering breath escaped Carey, nevertheless

He dared not succumb to optimism Between him and these others, all other men indeed, he still sensed something inexplicable, as if he were befogged in vibrations of a different plane He could not see this clouding envelope It was a thing to be felt, but not by a normal perceptive faculty He wondered if he really differed in any strange way from ordinary men It appeared almost that he did

He shuddered slightly in recollection of that night on the lower Yangtze when he, and only he, had seen those lights Every man who had been on the bridge when the thing had occurred had sworn to having seen not a single light He, Carey, witness at the captain's own trial, had been alone in the affirmative He had not been told of course Yet instinctively he knew it must be so That night they had declared themselves Before the court they assuredly had done the same thing

Another witness was summoned.

Through the haze of strange introspection Carey heard fragments of his testimony

To think that this companion of many an upper Yangtze rice-bird hunt, this doctor who had brought him through the dengue fever down in Cavite, should now have to vouch for him in a general court To think—could something about him really be different from other men? Was he—gifted? Why had it been given to him, and him only, to see what had been withheld from the sight of all other men on the ship—those lights? Or was he prone to temporary hallucination such as his captain pitifully had hinted in an endeavor to extenuate his—Carey's—crime? And was the medico now—?

"No" The doctor's voice rose "I have fished, hunted,

shopped, seen the sights with Carey, and doctored him, for the last year and a half He is not insane ”

Carey’s heart leaped in gratitude at the man’s vehement assertion The medico, too, was a man!

But—insane!

Surely the court had understood the captain’s hint Not by any possible chance could they bring that dread judgment of his case Never!

And yet—he, and only he, had been the man to see And then, that trouble with the captain Carey shook his head Surely he had not been even temporarily mad Persons laboring under mental delusions promptly forgot, he had heard, the vagaries of their period of aberration And too clearly could he still recall those lights, still envision that horrid struggle on the destroyer’s bridge From the first order he had given the man at the wheel every incident was indelibly impressed on his memory, and with a clarity not to be confuted Even to the final catastrophe and the terror inspired by the crew. No, no, the medico was quite right. He, Carey, was not insane

Yet, somehow, he was the only one.

Dimly the doctor’s voice drifted again through the cloud.

“No, sir ” He was answering the judge advocate’s question “I tested Carey’s eyes when he went up for full lieutenant just before we sailed from the Philippines They were perfect then And I examined them yesterday again His eyes are perfect now ”

Carey quivered slightly. If it wasn’t his eyes what could it be?

The captain had declared that he was a trustworthy seaman, the medico swore that he was neither insane nor visually defective Then what? He had seen

And ever since the thing had occurred he had been in this daze He could not understand

The judge advocate put another question.

The doctor answered with promptness and certitude.

“Yes, I have heard of such cases They are not of uncommon occurrence I have heard them discussed in many a wardroom Last spring, when the division was proceeding

from Manila to Lungayen Gulf for torpedo practice there happened an instance of it I was on the flagboat, leading the column. It was during the first watch I was on the bridge, and the captain and navigator were there with the officer of the deck

"We had just rounded Cape Bolinao and expected to pick up the light across the gulf We were all peering dead ahead—there's always a little rivalry to sight a light first The division commander ordered one-third speed until we got a bearing on that light. Then he was going to turn column right and go down the gulf and anchor off Dagupan

"For half an hour every man on the bridge gazed straight ahead and strained to see the light we knew must show up Suddenly one of the men on the lookout sang out that he saw it. He pointed almost due west, about a point on the port bow We all strove to make it out The lookout insisted it was there Then one after another we saw it. It was an occulting light, and we could even discern its pulsations and check its rate The column swung south at standard speed

"Ten minutes later we had to change course several degrees to westward to avoid going on the beach The next day we received a radio to the effect that that light had not been in order for two nights Yet we had seen it. We had expected it to be there, and our straining eyes had actually envisioned the thing It's a common enough occurrence, as I said before The eye often sees what we want it to see"

The members of the court nodded understandingly The judge advocate made a pertinent query

"Is it really the eye that sees this specter of a light that doesn't exist?"

The doctor shook his head

"I would say not," he answered slowly. "In my estimation it is not the eye that sees it at all It's the brain behind the eye The brain knows that the light ought to be seen and deludes itself into the belief that it actually does see it. No, it's the brain in such a case rather than the eye "

"But in the defendant's case," came the logical question, "there was no such expectation How do you account for that?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders Carey moved uneasily in his chair

That was the very question that had troubled him ever since that night a week ago. He had not expected to see the things that so clearly impressed themselves on his vision. He had not even been thinking about such a thing. The lower reaches of the Yangtze had few enough lights, and sparse were ships that ran the river at night. His own destroyer had attempted it solely because ordered down from Chefoo for emergency missionary protection upstream. For above Hankow was a local uprising led by a Taoist priesthood. The river gunboats were five hundred miles farther upstream, and turtle slow. The destroyer, though north in Pechili Gulf, could reach the threatened area first. So they had entered the river's upper channel at night.

No, he had not expected to see a thing. And yet of the half dozen men on the bridge he had, and only he. The medico had just stated that such hallucination was of the brain rather than the eye. Could it have been his brain—his alone? The fog closed in upon Carey again. He found it hard to think.

"In the defendant's case," he felt more than heard the doctor say, "I find no precedent. I can simply testify that he is a steady man, entirely sane, and has perfect eyesight. And yet I do believe that he was dead certain that he saw those lights. And as certain, too, that the others did not. What he saw must have been a delusion of the mind, yet of a mind that was normal. Such things also do occur. Yet his eyes are perfect, and he is as balanced mentally as any officer here."

Carey's hands bit into each other.

His captain was for him. And now the medico.

And yet—and yet? What could the court do? He had committed a crime for which in olden days he might have hanged. And his excuse for the offense was what? Simply that he had seen something that no other man had seen. The mere fact that the catastrophe he saw coming overwhelmed them on the very heels of the captain's interference could have but little weight with a court that must decide his fate on tangible fact.

And yet—good Heaven, it must be excuse enough! He had seen the lights, the captain had interfered, disaster had followed. It would not have closed upon them had the captain

let him alone Surely the court must understand that He had explained it all so carefully, in minutest detail, when his counsel had put him on the stand as witness in his own behalf

The doctor was dismissed The court was cleared.

II

Carey had the freedom of the ship For a moment he felt that the fresh breeze sweeping from the rice paddies of the lower Whampoo and the Yangtze beyond would clear his head and give a little friendly stimulation Then he recalled that other officers would be topside Friends they all were, indeed But Carey did not desire brotherly companionship just now, nor did he care to feel the pitying glances of old shipmates He wanted to be alone, to think, to go over again the events of the past week, of that night He turned down the passageway to the stateroom assigned him since the disaster Now that he was away from the atmosphere of the court he already felt better

The doctor had said that his eyes were normal He had also declared that his brain was as rational as that of any officer on the court—a fine thing and a daring one for a destroyer medical officer to say He must have meant it, must have wanted to strongly impress the court with his earnestness and his belief Carey drew a breath of relief

Good eyes, good mind The chill fog that in fear for the latter had penetrated his very being, gradually began to dissipate

How clearly it all came back

He had been officer of the deck The captain had snatched a hasty meal from the food brought up by his Filipino boy to the emergency cabin on the bridge The navigator had plotted changes of course, and was below finishing off his coffee with the other officers

A half hour remained of the second dog watch Carey had been going over some points he wished to impress upon the chief boatswain's mate when he took the eight o'clock reports A tear in the awning canvas where it stretched tight over the freezing apparatus on top of the ice locker just abaft the bridge was one of these

The awning was beginning to flap, and this night Carey demanded silence on the bridge. He could sense better, then, any variation in the hum of the forced draft blowers. And in the currents of the lower Yangtze all things must be anticipated. The officer of the deck must know as soon as the fire-room watch that something was going wrong. Must have the fo'c'sle gang ready to let go the anchor even before word of the lost steam came through the voice tube.

He stood on the starboard side of the bridge, near the rack of tubes, leaning on the sill of the open port. Fleet sparks from the captain's pipe indicated his almost identical position near the engine-room telegraphs to port. Carey was almost tempted to call the boatswain's mate at once to have that awning repaired. He had all but turned to give the order when his eye caught something yet dim in the distance.

For a minute or more he gazed steadily at the object. Then, from where they were hanging on one of the search-light directing wheels on the bulkhead of the emergency cabin, he took up his binoculars. Faintly through the glass he could make out that there were three lights instead of one.

He softly called the starboard lookout. "Do you see any lights about three points on the bow?" he asked. "Pretty far off?"

The lookout stared into the blackness of the night, blinking as the damp breeze bedewed his eyelashes. Then he shook his head. "No, sir."

"Try the glass," Carey suggested.

The lad shook his head as before.

"Don't see a thing, sir."

"Certain of it?" demanded Carey.

"Absolutely, sir," was the answer.

Carey remembered all this with extreme clearness—every detail. Lying on the bunk in his stateroom, he found himself living over again that fifteen-minute period in which so much had happened.

He had taken the binoculars from the lookout, and ordered him back to his post. Then he glanced at the clock on the emergency cabin bulkhead just behind the man at the wheel. This was a matter of habit. There was nothing to record. He

had not expected to see any lights, anyway. And the flapping of the canvas over the ice locker did not disconcert him now. It had become part of the normal respiration of the ship, and Carey decided that he would not disturb the boatswain's mate about it until the eight o'clock reports.

He turned back to his open port, but discovered the captain staring out into the blackness, charging his pipe with one of the patent fillers he had bought from the Greek in Chefoo. He paused tentatively at his elbow, undecided whether to stay there or assume the captain's former position near the annunciators.

Then something urged him to remain. The captain acknowledged his presence with a grunt.

"Did you see something?"

Carey nodded rather hesitantly.

"Thought I did, sir. Looked to me like a ship's light off to starboard."

The captain lifted his binoculars and focused them in the direction Carey had indicated. The latter raised his own glass. He recalled that he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"The lights are there, sir, all right. Seem nearer now, too."

"Humph! I don't make anything out," grunted the captain.

Carey stepped back of him and leveled an arm over his shoulder with the edge of his hand up, as in aiming.

"About two points on the bow, sir. Left a trifle, captain. There—that's it. See them now, sir?"

Intently the captain gazed, slowly changing focus with his forefinger on the adjusting wheel. Then he dropped the glass.

"Don't see a thing, Carey."

He bent to gain the protection of the bulkhead, and a match scratched, then glowed over his pipe.

"That's funny," Carey answered, somewhat mystified.

He wondered if perhaps his last look at the light-flooded chart had left dancing gleams on the retina of his eye. He carefully wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, and cleaned the binoculars with a bit of lens paper. Then raised them again—and started.

"But the lights are close now, captain." He lowered his glass slightly. "Why, I can see them with my naked eye! Right there, sir." He leveled his arm again.

"Hanged if I can see 'em, Carey. But this river breeze blurs everything Let's try your glass"

Carey ducked from under the leather strap and handed the binoculars over The captain rapidly found focus, then shook his head again

"Not a thing, not a thing Better have your eyes examined, young fellow."

"But they're holding steady, captain!" Carey expostulated "A ship as clear as day Heading from starboard across our course I can see her masthead and port running light. And cabin lights topside" Suddenly he swung to the wheelsman. "What's your compass?"

"Right on, sir. Two forty-eight"

"Come on two sixty," Carey ordered.

"What's that?" demanded the captain

"Get the time of that change, quartermaster," snapped Carey Then in answer to the captain "Shifting course a bit to the right, sir She's got the right of way, and there's no use taking any chances"

"Who's got the right of way?" the captain demanded again.

"That ship, sir—"

"Dammit, Carey, your eyes must have gone bad There's no ship in sight"

"But, Captain Kennart—"

The captain turned sharply to the wheelsman

"Back on your former course!" To the quartermaster: "Get that time" He swung back to the open port, and snapped for the lookouts Sensing something unusual in the very atmosphere, the whole bridge force was now tensely on the alert. "Do you lads see anything ahead—lights?"

All hands intently stared out into the blackness of the night.

Their opinion was unanimous "Not a thing, sir"

Carey gave a cry of alarm "Captain!" He turned savagely on the man at the wheel. "Fifteen degrees right On the jump now!"

The captain's suddenly livid face glared in the glow of the binnacle light.

"Dammit, sir, get off the bridge!" he cried peremptorily.

To the wheelsman. "Back to your former course. Snap into it! You're taking your orders from me now Lively!"

Carey recalled how the men had looked at each other in consternation. He recalled his own utter dismay. For the first time in his career he was ordered off the bridge. That ship—lights looming up now not a cable length away. Holding steadily on the same angle—collision sure! And he, officer of the deck, when the life of his ship was a matter of seconds and every one blind but him, ordered below. Good Heaven! It meant shipwreck, the captain was bound for destruction. Mad! He resolved on one last frantic appeal.

"But Great God, captain—it's on our very bows! We'll hit sure! We'll—"

The captain turned on him with an oath. Then as Carey stood his ground the captain's face became hard and grim. A deadly implication chilled in the ice-level tone his voice held

"Mr. Carey, consider yourself under arrest. You're either mutinous or mad. This will be reported when we finish the business upriver and return to Shanghai. Get out!"

The lights were within a hundred yards, Carey saw. He was ordered off in disgrace. The captain was mad himself. The whole bridge force had gone mad. That ship—

His answer was literally forced from him. "By Heaven, sir, I will not leave!" he cried in utter desperation.

And he leaped to the annunciators and jerked the signals for both engines to full reverse. Then jumped for the steering gear, shoved the man aside, and madly spun the wheel to starboard.

With an oath the captain seized him, cried to the lookout to drag him below. A struggle ensued. The ship throbbed as the power of thirty thousand horses strove to stop its forward rush. Carey remembered the cloud of horror and impotence that almost overcame him. His one thought was for the ship, and of the vessel even now across their knife-like stem.

He recalled his last hopeless words, forgetful of naval discipline and the men about.

"The lights! Too late! Too late! Captain, you damn fool—" And then the crash had come

III

Lying in the bunk, the racking shock of it was a physical blow again Carey recalled sickeningly his own release—too late The startled outcries of the men, the intermittent raucous honking of the general alarm someone had retained command enough to switch on from the bridge The shrill piping of the boatswain's mate, his bellowing roar of. "All hands abandon ship!"

And then the siren's scream.

His station in such an emergency was in charge of No 2 life raft Later he found himself clinging to this bobbing float, mind and body benumbed by the whispering waves of the swirling Yangtze

Rescue Court martial

The captain for the loss of his ship He himself for mutinous insubordination

And yet—he had seen those lights.

A fog gathered about him again.

IV

Pulsations beat upon his brain Dimly he recognized them as rapid footsteps in the passageway outside his room He aroused somewhat as his door was flung open and a shipmate burst in upon him Blinking, he noted that the newcomer was excited to an extreme

"News, by thunder, news for you, Warren! The admiral says he's going to quash every court martial that came out of the wreck. News from the divers down the river just came up, and set him all in a daze He's pacing the deck now We did not hit an uncharted rock last week, Warren We tore our bottom out on the hulk of the *Kew Li*, whose boilers blew up, and only two men left to tell the tale And what gets the admiral, Warren, is that you swore you saw those lights on the night of the wreck, but the *Kew Li* went down four months ago!"

Harold Lawlor

The Silver Highway

It is only in justice to myself that I set down this complete account of the happenings in the Museum of Industry last September In the affair of the 1905 Pope-Hartford run-about, I have known bewilderment and suffered a haunting sense of guilt And yet the three local newspapers were most unfair at the time One ignored my story altogether, another misspelled my name, and the third chose to treat the whole thing facetiously—as if I were a senile old fool for whom the wagon should be sent!

It is not that I wish boastfully to pose as a *deus ex machina*, but I was surely an instrument of Fate that September afternoon as I walked up the broad shallow marble steps of the Museum For this I feel to be a certainty it was only to someone like me—so close to death myself—that the secret of the Pope-Hartford runabout could have been revealed.

I am seventy-three years old, a retired railroad executive living on a small pension, slowly dying of an incurable disease I have no wish to excite your pity, Death, to me, will come only as a welcome release I have no family, my friends are gone, my life's work done No, my condition is neither sad nor pitiable

But one can't sit around, bleakly waiting for the grave to yawn So I have fallen into the habit of visiting the many museums for which this city is noted And of them all the Museum of Industry interested me most on that first visit.

As a retired railroad man, the early trains—the actual coaches and locomotives themselves, not miniatures or replicas, set up on the Museum floor—fascinated me So I lingered over them, and it wasn't until late in the afternoon that I finally visited the exhibit known as A STREET IN 1905

I'm not sure in my own mind even now whether I should regret having entered it

This display is housed in a separate room to itself And it

is exactly what its name implies. There's a red-cobbled street, lined with shop-windows filled with figures dressed in the clothing of that day. There's a nickelodeon where you may view cinemas featuring Fatty Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and other early stars of the motion picture industry—all to the tune of a jangling piano. And at intervals along the curbs there are perhaps a dozen motorcars of that era, as bright of brass and shiny of enamel as if they had at just that moment been driven from the showroom floors.

Almost you feel as if you might get in and drive away. Gas street lamps of the period flicker duskily, and it is only after your eyes have become accustomed to the dim light that you see the cars are elevated slightly on blocks of wood so that their tires might not rot from contact with the cobblestones.

The exhibit was to me a mixture of pleasure and pain. Oldsmobile, Brush, Simplex. As I recognized the different cars, I felt pang after pang of nostalgia, remembering back to that time forty years before when I, too, was young. Many of the makes were obsolete, and had been for years. Soon now, I also—

I sighed, and went slowly on. And then I stopped. There stood a Pope-Hartford runabout, proud in the splendor of its bright red paint and glittering brass headlights. I can't tell you of my delight. I almost cried out, as if meeting an old friend. For the very first car I'd ever owned had been its twin.

And so, halting, thus it was that I met—her.

"I beg your pardon," came a voice.

I blinked in the dim light, and settled my glasses more firmly upon my nose. At first I thought her a wax figurine, placed on the front seat of the Pope-Hartford to add to the authenticity of the exhibit, for there had been other such figures in the cars I had passed. But, no.

She was dressed in a long linen duster and a linen hat, bound round with an emerald veil tied in a bow under her chin. Modish clothing for motoring—in 1905. And she was looking at me, and smiling. She wasn't beautiful, but she had the prettiness of youth. An air of breathless expectancy.

hovered about her, and oh! there was a lovely eager light in her eyes

It's strange now to remember that I was not particularly startled when she spoke. Perhaps at my age one becomes like a child again, and accepts things as easily as children do. Perhaps it was just that I was a little dazed at discovering she was flesh and blood, and not a model of wax. For I didn't cry out in alarm or surprise. I just stood there, blinking a little in confusion.

"I beg your pardon," she said again, leaning forward a trifle eagerly. "I wonder if you know what's keeping Arthur?"

"Why—why, no, I don't," I said.

"Oh, dear—" The car had no doors, and I could see her tiny foot tapping impatiently on the rubber-covered floor-board. "I've been waiting so long. He said he'd be right out." She blushed then, and cast down her eyes, as if her impatience embarrassed her. "I suppose you're one of the wedding guests?"

I didn't know what to say. She appeared not to notice my confusion, so engrossed was she in her own thoughts.

"I've been waiting hours and hours, and *still* he doesn't come." Her pink mouth pouted prettily. "I'm so excited, and he knows excitement is bad for my heart. That's why Papa objected to our marriage just at first, you know, even though he likes Arthur so much and says he has a fine business head on his shoulders."

"And so he has, but—" She dimpled and leaned forward with a pretty air of confiding in me. "What I like best about him is that he has such a poetic nature, too. Last night he said, 'Soon now, Lucy, we'll be riding down that silver highway—to happiness!'"

She blushed, and looked at me from under her long lashes. "Isn't that lovely? Oh, I can hardly wait! If you see Arthur, will you *please* tell him to hurry?"

Her voice stopped, and she looked at me imploringly.

I put a hand to my forehead. For some minutes past I'd been feeling very odd. It had been so long since I'd had lunch that I was a little dizzy. I couldn't seem to understand what this was all about. For the first time the whole business began

to strike me as queer. Why should she be sitting here all alone? She kept looking expectantly past my shoulder, but when I turned there was nothing to see save one of the lighted shop-windows in the exhibit. Everything was flickering eerily in the dim light that only emphasized the general gloom.

It was while I was standing there, wavering, uncertain how to answer but unable to move away, that a new voice spoke up.

"Is anything the matter, sir? Are you ill?"

I looked aside to find a blue-uniformed guard standing near, watching me anxiously.

"Why, no," I said "I was just talking to the young lady."

"What young lady, sir?"

I looked at him, wondering. She was sitting there, right in front of him. He couldn't help but see her. "The young lady in the car," I said.

He looked from me to the car, and back again. His anxiety deepened, judging from his frown. "There is no young lady in the car."

I could see no point to his joke, if joke it was. The girl—she'd called herself Lucy—was still gazing expectantly past my shoulder, looking directly into the guard's face. I smiled at her uncertainly. "The attendant says you're not sitting there in the car."

She looked at me, wide-eyed. "What attendant? There's no one here but you and me."

I could feel myself going then. The lights of the exhibit, dim before, were now flashing brilliantly, on and off, like lightning. Or so it seemed. I was having trouble with my breathing, and my heart was beating in sickening, erratic tempo. I felt a strong arm across my back, just under my shoulders, supporting me.

Then everything went black.

There was the sharp sting of ammonia in my nostrils. I turned my head away, protesting thickly. Then someone was holding a glass to my lips. Someone was murmuring soothingly. "Take it easy now. Take it easy now, sir, and you'll be

all right There," as my eyes opened, "you're feeling better already, aren't you?"

Instantly my head cleared I felt none of the usual bewilderment that attends a return to consciousness I remembered distinctly, vividly, all that had happened in A STREET IN 1905

"The girl," I mumbled "The girl in the Pope-Hartford run-about."

"He's still dazed" It was the guard speaking to another. They flanked me on either side We were sitting on one of the marble benches in the foyer of the Museum. "He keeps talking about a girl, and there wasn't any girl in the car."

"Poor old codger," the other said "The exhibit probably brings back memories to him, Mullen"

I began excitedly to explain the whole thing, but they hushed me up "Come now, sir," said Mullen, "if you're feeling better, I'm afraid you'll have to leave It's way past closing time"

It seemed useless to protest any more, to hammer against the wall of their disbelief Besides, I wanted time to think. I declined Mullen's offer to call me a cab, and walked down the marble steps The Museum, if you remember, is situated in one of our large public parks When I was far enough away to attract no attention in case the guards were still watching, I sank onto a park bench

I was shaken by my experience, and I couldn't clarify it in my mind How much did I actually remember, how much had I imagined? If the girl, Lucy, had really been there, why had I seen her when the guard couldn't? Why had she seen me, when she couldn't see the guard? Had they both been lying? And, if so, to what purpose? Why should they attempt to deceive me, a total stranger? It was pointless

There remained only one plausible explanation My illness was causing me to have hallucinations But this theory I rejected instantly I was positive that I hadn't imagined anything I remembered too vividly seeing the girl, talking to her I could describe her to the last detail, recall every word we'd exchanged

I got to my feet, sorely puzzled But of this much I was

determined: on the morrow I would revisit the Museum of Industry.

My actions on the next day would undoubtedly have been amusing to anyone save myself. I returned to the Museum, but for hours I pottered about, visiting every exhibit except *A STREET IN 1905*.

You may wonder that I didn't go there immediately. It was like this with me. For the first time in months, my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I had a consuming interest in life. And so I was determined to savor it as long as possible. I hesitated to return to the exhibit for fear I should find an empty motorcar containing no pretty girl, no mystery, nothing. I not only feared it, I expected it. And I knew, and was afraid, of the sick disappointment I'd feel when I learned it had all been an illusion.

There was one thing I meant to find out first, if I could. Accordingly I made my way to the office of the director of the Museum on the top floor. I paused outside the door lettered "Albert J. Hawkes," but finally brought myself to enter.

Mr. Hawkes was a fussy little man in his forties. I believe he rather welcomed my appearance, for he wasn't very busy. By indirection, I led the conversation to the real object of my visit.

"Do you have in your files," I asked, "the names of the original owners of the cars in *A STREET IN 1905*?"

"In some instances, yes, Mr. Ellis. Where the owner kept the car for years, finally donating it himself to the Museum. Sometimes, though, the cars were bought from dealers specializing in such things—in which case, they'd probably changed hands many times."

"I'd like to find out, if possible, who owned the Pope-Hartford runabout now in the exhibit."

"May I ask why?"

I had no intention of telling him the truth. And I was determined to avoid all mention of Lucy, for I wanted no doubts raised as to my sanity. I thought I knew what to expect, after my experience of the day before with the guards.

So I answered evasively, "I once owned a car very like it. It would please me to think it was my car that had come to

rest here" Though I knew very well it was not my car. Mine had been demolished in an accident years before

Hawkes nodded, with a tolerant smile for my vanity. He spoke into the inter-office annunciator, and presently his secretary brought in a file.

But I was doomed to disappointment.

Hawkes looked through the file, and shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry, Mr. Ellis. The Pope-Hartford runabout was bought from a dealer down in Indiana who was going out of business."

I hid my disappointment as well as I could, and shortly afterward took my leave, prepared to forget the whole thing. But after I'd lunched in the basement cafeteria, I found I couldn't bring myself to leave the Museum without another visit to **A STREET IN 1905**.

It was just as I'd remembered from yesterday—the red-cobbled pavement, the shop-windows, the motorcars that were a far cry from today's streamlined models.

I'm not ashamed to confess that my heart was pounding as I approached the Pope-Hartford runabout.

But I needn't have feared.

For she was there, still looking impatiently off to the right, her expectant expression a little strained by now, her eyes seemingly a little tired.

Her smile for me was absent-minded.

"I'm sorry I left you so abruptly yesterday," I apologized. "I was taken suddenly ill."

"Yesterday?" She frowned slightly. "Why, you've only been gone a second."

I scarcely heard her. I had so little time. The guard was not in sight but he might reappear at any moment. And I had no wish to attract his attention again. I said, "Won't you tell me how you happen to be here in the Museum?"

"Museum?" She cocked her head like an inquisitive bird. "I don't understand you."

I gestured around, impatiently. "But surely you can see? We're here in the Museum of Industry. In the exhibit called **A STREET IN 1905**. You're garbed in the clothing of forty years ago. You're sitting in a car that's forty years old."

"But—that's silly! My clothes are brand-new. And so is the car" She looked at me in faint alarm

"This is 1945," I insisted. "Why, the Museum itself wasn't built forty years ago."

She was cowering away from me "Please go away!" she begged "You frighten me Nothing of what you say is true"

"But it is, it is!" I was growing excited "Look about you! Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Stop it, stop it!" She was really frightened now. Her eyes were wide with terror. "This is no Museum. We're here on the graveled driveway. There's the porte-cochere overhead! There's the door to my father's house! Oh, I wish Arthur would come! He'll—he'll *hit* you! Yes, he will, for scaring me so! You're a horrible old man!"

"I'm telling you the truth!" I was almost beside myself. I was shouting in my effort to convince her I was waving my arms wildly, when I felt myself grabbed roughly from behind.

"See here now, sir!" It was Mullen, back again. "You'll have to stop this!"

"There were ten or twelve people behind him, all staring curiously, speaking together in alarmed whispers the while they eyed me apprehensively. Then a portly little man was pushing them aside, bustling forward importantly.

It was Hawkes, the Museum director.

"What's all this to-do, Mullen?" he asked the guard testily.

"It's this old gentleman, Mr Hawkes. He's creating a disturbance. He was in here yesterday and was taken ill, raving about some girl he said he could see in this car. He's probably harmless enough, but a little—you know." Mullen made a circular motion with his forefinger at the side of his head

"I'm *not* crazy!" I sputtered, outraged "I'm only trying to convince the young lady in the car here—"

"Come now, my dear sir, we simply can't have this sort of thing going on here in the Museum at all." Mr. Hawkes laid his hand gently enough on my arm. "There's no young lady in the car, as anyone can see for himself."

I looked around. The others present were nodding their heads in agreement. I forced myself to speak quietly.

"Just a minute, please." I shook off Hawkes' hand, and

turned to the girl in the car "Lucy, please believe that I have no desire to frighten you But all that I told you is true There are a dozen other people here besides myself Can you see them?"

She shook her head doubtfully "Only you."

"And they can't see you! I'm the only one who can"

She sensed at last the sincerity in my voice She must have Sick dismay was dawning in her eyes. "But then—what has happened to me?" Terror replaced dismay. "I'm afraid Afraid! Oh, can't someone help me?" She looked about imploringly Then, with a strangled sob, she covered her face with her hands and began to weep hopelessly, hunching her shoulders like a forlorn bird in the rain trying to cover itself with its wings

If I had had only a moment more then, I think I might have learned the truth But Hawkes was tugging impatiently at my arm

"Really now, sir," he stuttered "I must insist that you leave It's for your own good I feel you are unwell"

I did what I could I protested vehemently I gave them my card bearing my name and address, and begged that they investigate me But they ignored my request. Hawkes and Mullen tightened their grips on my arm They wanted only to get rid of me, to get me out of the Museum, presumably before I grew violent And I knew that, try as I would to enter again, I was barred from the Museum forever more They'd give out my description to all guards, and I'd be denied entrance at the door

Gently they hustled me from the exhibit. I strained my eyes, looking back through the dimness The last I saw of her, Lucy was still huddled there in her finery, crying quietly, hopelessly, on the front seat of the Pope-Hartford runabout

I returned home, common sense telling me I should try to dismiss from my mind the whole affair But I slept poorly that night and next day I knew it was useless I couldn't forget the sick despair in Lucy's eyes I'd torn the veil, destroying her illusion of happiness I must tear it yet a little more, trying to learn the truth I must help her, or I'd never rest peacefully

There was only one thing to do Investigate for myself The problem was where to begin It seemed hopeless The trail was so old And then it occurred to me that surely there couldn't have been many Pope-Hartford runabouts on the road in 1905. And hardly more than one whose owner's first name was Arthur To be sure, the car may never have been registered in this city, but that was the chance I had to take.

Luckily, this city is the capital of the state I looked up the address of the license bureau and went down there They weren't eager to look through their files for comparatively ancient and dusty tomes, but a greenback discreetly slipped into the hand of one of the attendants gained me entrance to the vault itself where the books were kept After a prolonged search, I found the volume of registrations for 1905

Going through the book was slow work and tedious, for there were more cars registered that year than one would have supposed But at last I found it A Pope-Hartford runabout registered in the name of Arthur H Comstock of 194 Beverley Drive.

I dropped in at the nearest drugstore and looked at the telephone directory And here I drew a blank. There was no Arthur H Comstock listed in the directory at all

Well, that was that. Dejectedly I boarded a streetcar for home. But I hadn't gone two blocks before I was excitedly ringing the bell to stop the car. Of course! The suburban directory! After all, forty years had elapsed. The man might have followed the trend to the suburbs.

My hunch was proved right. There was an Arthur H. Comstock on Roscommon Place, out in Glen Oaks I was shaking with excitement and hope as I boarded the inter-urban

A Filipino man-servant admitted me to Arthur Comstock's home after taking my card, vanishing for minutes, and returning with his employer's permission to let me in.

Comstock was perhaps five years younger than myself—a tall, thin man with white hair, cold eyes, and an embittered expression on his face He was wearing a dinner jacket, and on the left lapel was a decoration I recognized—the tiny bright red ribbon of the Legion of Honor.

He was standing before the fireplace looking at my card in a puzzled manner as I entered diffidently, but he thawed enough to ask me to sit down. Now that I was there, I felt decidedly uncomfortable and at a loss as to know just how to begin.

There was nothing else to do. I plunged "Mr. Comstock, I believe you were once the owner of a Pope-Hartford runabout?"

I was hardly prepared for his reaction to my question. For a second he looked stunned, then ill. He turned the color of unset cement. And then the angry red surged into his face.

"Who are you?" he clipped. "What do you mean by coming in here and asking—?"

I said, "Please. Won't you hear me out? I've been very much disturbed these last few days. Do you know that the car, which I believe to be yours, is on exhibit in the Museum of Industry?"

His eyes were fixed on me coldly. "I know nothing about it. I sold it long ago. But, even so, I can't possibly conceive your object—"

He broke off. But he seemed rather wary. Anyone could guess that in some manner the Pope-Hartford runabout had played an important part in his life. It had been more than a means of transportation or source of pleasure. And because I sensed this so very strongly it gave me the courage to go on.

"Is there any reason," I asked, "why someone should be waiting for you in the Pope-Hartford runabout? A young girl, in a linen duster, with an emerald veil? A girl with hazel eyes and soft brown hair? A girl named—Lucy?"

I stopped, appalled. Comstock was staring at me. His mouth was opening and closing soundlessly. And on his face there was a well-nigh indescribable expression. An expression compounded weirdly of horror and nausea and malevolence. For a moment I thought he meant to attack me. And then he collapsed, utterly and completely. I was never more alarmed in my life.

There was a decanter on a stand, next to the divan on which he'd fallen. I took it upon myself to pour him a drink, place it in his shaking hands. He tried to refuse it. He kept shaking his head, like a man with palsy.

"Get out!" he muttered hoarsely "Get out! I don't know who you are, but—"

"I had no idea—" I began helplessly, guiltily. My own hands were shaking in reaction

By a visible effort, he regained control of himself, and his face was an icy mask of barely restrained fury and resentment "You're a feature writer, I suppose," he sneered "Anything for a story. Raking over the dust of forty years like a ghoul, exposing the grief and unhappiness of others to earn a miserable dollar for yourself. Get out of my house!"

I stood my ground I'd started this and I meant to finish it.

"I'm as unhappy about this as yourself," I said "I've had no rest for two days—not since she spoke to me in the Museum."

And quickly, before he could halt me, I poured out the story of the girl in the exhibit He listened Unwillingly at first, but he listened And as I hurried on eagerly, my words almost tripping over themselves in my haste, I could see reluctant belief begin to dawn in his eyes, to grow, until at last he was listening raptly with a faraway look on his face I knew he was no longer even aware of my presence I knew he believed.

"Lucy," he said softly "*Lucy!*"

"You can't misunderstand me now," I finished "What would be my object in making up so preposterous a story? What have I to gain? Surely you can see it's only for my own peace of mind that I've persisted in following up what clues I had?"

He said heavily, "Sit down, Mr —Ellis."

"You do know the girl?" I asked eagerly. "There is some story about the Pope-Hartford runabout?"

His face was drawn and haggard as he nodded. "Yes She was my wife Forty years ago, Mr Ellis, we were married The reception was held at her father's house. I parked the Pope-Hartford runabout under the porte-cochere at the side It was new, I'd just bought it for our honeymoon trip Our friends knew nothing about it. They thought we were leaving in the carriage at the front door. The carriage was

only a decoy, of course, for them to tie their signs and tin cans on "

He had a faint smile for the memory of that past gaiety.

"Well, the plan was that I should hold them back, while Lucy changed into her going-away clothes, and slipped down a back stairway to wait for me in the car I'd join her there, and then we'd be off, giving our friends the slip—"

The faint smile had faded And I've never seen such sadness in the eyes of a human being

"And then?" I prompted softly Though I really didn't need to hear

He looked at me numbly "When I joined her, she was sitting erect in the front seat. I thought she had fallen asleep But when I touched her gently to awaken her, she slumped forward She was dead, Mr Ellis, of a heart attack brought on by the excitement Dead, and we hadn't yet begun to live! I'd loved her deeply. I was nearly insane in my grief "

His hands opened emptily, and he sighed "Well, and that was the end of it, the shattering of a dream As for the car, I couldn't stand the sight of it. I never wanted to see it again It lay there in her father's driveway for weeks until finally I had someone tow it away, and it was sold And that was the last I ever heard of it But now—now—"

He looked at me bleakly "I've never been able to believe in a life after death, Mr Ellis In my bitterness at losing Lucy, I've lived life to the full, plunging into experiences sometimes sordid, grabbing anything I cared to take, feeling it was no more than my due Because Life itself, you see, had cheated me of the only thing I'd ever really wanted But if I thought Lucy had been waiting faithfully all these years, while I—" He winced, and added, low, "Ah, what must she think of me?"

I glanced away It seemed indecent to look at the naked pain in his face I said, "I wish you'd go to the Museum with me tomorrow afternoon Will you?"

And he said, "Yes" But his voice was dull As dull as his eyes

I left him there alone And though he'd made the appointment with me readily enough for the next afternoon, I felt

the first faint qualms of distrust. Had he been right? Were it better I had not stirred up the dust of forty years?

And oh! would Lucy *see* him?

I dreamed of her that night. Or was it a dream? There was the gentlest of caresses upon my cheek, the lightest of butterfly kisses. My hand went up to touch the spot where warm pink lips had rested briefly.

"Thank you!" she said "Oh, *thank* you!"

It was Lucy's voice. And she was happy. I couldn't doubt it. Her happiness was almost a tangible thing. And suddenly I knew. And suddenly it no longer mattered that I was slowly dying. For Death, I knew at last, was not an awesome thing, a specter to be feared. Why, Death could be beautiful! You had only to hear Lucy's voice to know.

But why was she thanking me?

Was it a dream?

It was in the morning that Mrs. Langdon, my landlady, knocked at my door "Some gentlemen to see you, Mr. Ellis."

Her voice seemed to waver uncertainly on the word "gentlemen," and she looked at me strangely when I opened my door "They're waiting for you in the parlor, sir."

There was something odd about her manner, but I went directly downstairs. Two policemen were standing there. And with them was Hawkes, the director of the Museum of Industry.

"This is the man," he said to the policemen upon my appearance.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

One of the officers spoke up. "I'll tell you frankly, sir, we have no warrant for your arrest. But we think it'd be to your own interest to come along with us for questioning."

"But I'm expecting a caller," I protested.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ellis," Hawkes said "But I know you'll find this more important. It isn't that we suspect you, exactly—after all, there's the question of your age—and, frankly—"

He was growing incoherent. He broke off, mopped his brow "I detest mystery!" he said fretfully, and looked at me as if something were my fault.

My curiosity was such, by now, that I would have accom-

panied them any place. But they took me only to the Museum of Industry, up the familiar marble steps, into the private office of Mr. Hawkes.

And behind Hawkes' desk sat a man they introduced as Inspector Shrewsbury. On his right sat the guard, Mullen.

"That's the man!" Mullen cried excitedly as I entered. "The one who was hanging around the car, acting so funny."

I said quietly, "Perhaps if you'll be good enough to tell me what this is all about—?"

Inspector Shrewsbury was eyeing me intently. "The Pope-Hartford automobile, in which you were so interested, was stolen during the night."

"Stolen?" I hadn't quite expected that. "But—"

"Exactly!" cried little Mr. Hawkes excitedly. "I tell you, it's impossible! The Museum's doors are locked, the guards, the alarm system—" He was growing incoherent again. "The car couldn't have been stolen!"

"Yet," Shrewsbury pointed out gently, "the car is gone. We'd like you to tell us, Mr. Ellis, just why you were so interested in that particular automobile."

I was shaken. I knew they'd never believe my story. But there was nothing for it. I asked if I might sit down, and then I told them all I knew about the Pope-Hartford runabout. Told them of my investigations, and my interview with Arthur Comstock, omitting no detail—every least word exchanged with Lucy and Arthur, every minute detail of their appearance, even to the French decoration Arthur wore in his lapel. I flatter myself that mine is a photographic memory, despite my age.

They listened in silence until I had finished.

"If you call Mr. Comstock, I'm sure he'll be glad to verify everything I've said," I ended.

Shrewsbury and Hawkes and Mullen exchanged glances. Plainly they all entertained doubts of my sanity. Nevertheless, Shrewsbury pulled the desk phone toward him and dialed.

When his call was answered, he asked for Mr. Comstock. And then it seemed to me he listened for minutes without saying a word, while my tension mounted. He had a poker face, but his eyes narrowed as he listened.

"Did you know Mr. Comstock well?" he asked when he'd hung up finally.

I knew something was wrong "I never met him before last night Tell me, what has happened?"

Shrewsbury hesitated, then shrugged "Comstock shot and killed himself, sometime just before dawn."

I think I must have known what his answer would be. I felt no shock But there was something—

Lucy. Where was Lucy?

"I'd like to go to A STREET IN 1905," I said.

Wordlessly they accompanied me And there on the cobbled street was the vacant space where the Pope-Hartford runabout had stood Seemingly it had vanished into thin air

Only the four wooden blocks that had held it yet remained

But I hoped I hoped that somewhere, some place, two light-hearted people were riding down that silver highway—to happiness

I told them so Shrewsbury, Mullen, and Hawkes.

"Of course, I don't expect you to believe me," I said defensively.

But I didn't really care. I believed What did it matter if they—

Shrewsbury stood motionless, staring thoughtfully down at the red cobblestones Then he uttered a wordless exclamation, and stooped in the dim light to pick up something When he stood erect again, he held out his hand

And resting on the palm of it was the tiny bright red ribbon of the Legion of Honor ...

Ambrose Bierce

The Moonlit Road

I

STATEMENT OF JOEL HETMAN, JR.

I am the most unfortunate of men Rich, respected, fairly well educated and of sound health—with many other advantages usually valued by those having them and coveted by those who have them not—I sometimes think that I should be less unhappy if they had been denied me, for then the contrast between my outer and my inner life would not be continually demanding a painful attention In the stress of privation and the need of effort I might sometimes forget the somber secret ever baffling the conjecture that it compels

I am the only child of Joel and Julia Hetman The one was a well-to-do country gentleman, the other a beautiful and accomplished woman to whom he was passionately attached with what I now know to have been a jealous and exacting devotion The family home was a few miles from Nashville, Tennessee, a large, irregularly built dwelling of no particular order of architecture, a little way off the road, in a park of trees and shrubbery

At the time of which I write I was nineteen years old, a student at Yale One day I received a telegram from my father of such urgency that in compliance with its unexplained demand I left at once for home At the railway station in Nashville a distant relative awaited me to apprise me of the reason for my recall my mother had been barbarously murdered—why and by whom none could conjecture, but the circumstances were these

My father had gone to Nashville, intending to return the next afternoon Something prevented his accomplishing the business in hand, so he returned on the same night, arriving just before the dawn In his testimony before the coroner

he explained that having no latchkey and not caring to disturb the sleeping servants, he had, with no clearly defined intention, gone round to the rear of the house. As he turned an angle of the building, he heard a sound as of a door gently closed, and saw in the darkness, indistinctly, the figure of a man, which instantly disappeared among the trees of the lawn. A hasty pursuit and brief search of the grounds in the belief that the trespasser was someone secretly visiting a servant proving fruitless, he entered at the unlocked door and mounted the stairs to my mother's chamber. Its door was open, and stepping into black darkness he fell headlong over some heavy object on the floor. I may spare myself the details, it was my poor mother, dead of strangulation by human hands!

Nothing had been taken from the house, the servants had heard no sound, and excepting those terrible finger marks upon the dead woman's throat—dear God! that I might forget them!—no trace of the assassin was ever found.

I gave up my studies and remained with my father, who, naturally, was greatly changed. Always of a sedate, taciturn disposition, he now fell into so deep a dejection that nothing could hold his attention, yet anything—a footfall, the sudden closing of a door—aroused in him a fitful interest, one might have called it an apprehension. At any small surprise of the senses he would start visibly and sometimes turn pale, then relapse into a melancholy apathy deeper than before. I suppose he was what is called a "nervous wreck." As to me, I was younger then than now—there is much in that Youth is Gilead, in which is balm for every wound. Ah, that I might again dwell in that enchanted land! Unacquainted with grief, I knew not how to appraise my bereavement; I could not rightly estimate the strength of the stroke.

One night, a few months after the dreadful event, my father and I walked home from the city. The full moon was about three hours above the eastern horizon, the entire countryside had the solemn stillness of a summer night, our footfalls and the ceaseless song of the katydids were the only sound aloof. Black shadows of bordering trees lay athwart the road, which, in the short reaches between, gleamed a ghostly white. As we approached the gate to our dwelling,

whose front was in shadow, and in which no light shone, my father suddenly stopped and clutched my arm, saying, hardly above his breath—

"God! God! what is that?"

"I hear nothing," I replied

"But see—see!" he said, pointing along the road, directly ahead

I said "Nothing is there. Come, father, let us go in—you are ill."

He had released my arm and was standing rigid and motionless in the center of the illuminated roadway, staring like one bereft of sense. His face in the moonlight showed a pallor and fixity inexpressibly distressing. I pulled gently at his sleeve, but he had forgotten my existence. Presently he began to retire backward, step by step, never for an instant removing his eyes from what he saw, or thought he saw. I turned half round to follow, but stood irresolute. I do not recall any feeling of fear, unless a sudden chill was its physical manifestation. It seemed as if an icy wind had touched my face and enfolded my body from head to foot, I could feel the stir of it in my hair.

At that moment my attention was drawn to a light that suddenly streamed from an upper window of the house—one of the servants, awakened by what mysterious premonition of evil who can say, and in obedience to an impulse that she was never able to name, had lit a lamp. When I turned to look for my father he was gone, and in all the years that have passed no whisper of his fate has come across the border-land of conjecture from the realm of the unknown.

II

STATEMENT OF CASPAR GRATTAN

To-day I am said to live, to-morrow, here in this room, will lie a senseless shape of clay that all too long was I. If anyone lift the cloth from the face of that unpleasant thing it will be in gratification of a mere morbid curiosity. Some, doubtless, will go further and inquire, "Who was he?" In this writing I supply the only answer that I am able to make—

Caspar Grattan Surely, that should be enough The name has served my small need for more than twenty years of a life of unknown length True, I gave it to myself, but lacking another I had the right In this world one must have a name, it prevents confusion, even when it does not establish identity Some, though, are known by numbers, which also seem inadequate distinctions

One day, for illustration, I was passing along a street of a city, far from here, when I met two men in uniform, one of whom, half pausing and looking curiously into my face, said to his companion, "That man looks like 767." Something in the number seemed familiar and horrible Moved by an uncontrollable impulse, I sprang into a side street and ran until I fell exhausted in a country lane

I have never forgotten that number, and always it comes to memory attended by gibbering obscenity, peals of joyless laughter, the clang of iron doors So I say a name, even if self-bestowed, is better than a number In the register of the potter's field I shall soon have both What wealth!

Of him who shall find this paper I must beg a little consideration It is not the history of my life; the knowledge to write that is denied me This is only a record of broken and apparently unrelated memories, some of them as distinct and sequent as brilliant beads upon a thread, others remote and strange, having the character of crimson dreams with interspaces blank and black—witch-fires glowing still and red in a great desolation

Standing upon the shore of eternity, I turn for a last look landward over the course by which I came There are twenty years of footprints fairly distinct, the impressions of bleeding feet They lead through poverty and pain, devious and unsure, as of one staggering beneath a burden—

Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.

Ah, the poet's prophecy of Me—how admirable, how dreadfully admirable!

Backward beyond the beginning of this *via dolorosa*—this epic of suffering with episodes of sin—I see nothing clearly;

it comes out of a cloud I know that it spans only twenty years, yet I am an old man

One does not remember one's birth—one has to be told. But with me it was different, life came to me full-handed and dowered me with all my faculties and powers Of a previous existence I know no more than others, for all have stammering intimations that may be memories and may be dreams I know only that my first consciousness was of maturity in body and mind—a consciousness accepted without surprise or conjecture I merely found myself walking in a forest, half-clad, footsore, unutterably weary and hungry. Seeing a farmhouse, I approached and asked for food, which was given me by one who inquired my name I did not know, yet knew that all had names. Greatly embarrassed, I retreated, and night coming on, lay down in the forest and slept.

The next day I entered a large town which I shall not name Nor shall I recount further incidents of the life that is now to end—a life of wandering, always and everywhere haunted by an overmastering sense of crime in punishment of wrong and of terror in punishment of crime Let me see if I can reduce it to narrative

I seem once to have lived near a great city, a prosperous planter, married to a woman whom I loved and distrusted We had, it sometimes seems, one child, a youth of brilliant parts and promise He is at all times a vague figure, never clearly drawn, frequently altogether out of the picture

One luckless evening it occurred to me to test my wife's fidelity in a vulgar, commonplace way familiar to everyone who has acquaintance with the literature of fact and fiction I went to the city, telling my wife that I should be absent until the following afternoon But I returned before daybreak and went to the rear of the house, purposing to enter by a door with which I had secretly so tampered that it would seem to lock, yet not actually fasten. As I approached it, I heard it gently open and close, and saw a man steal away into the darkness With murder in my heart, I sprang after him, but he had vanished without even the bad luck of identification Sometimes now I cannot even persuade myself that it was a human being

Crazed with jealousy and rage, blind and bestial with all the elemental passions of insulted manhood, I entered the house and sprang up the stairs to the door of my wife's chamber. It was closed, but having tampered with its lock also, I easily entered and despite the black darkness soon stood by the side of her bed. My groping hands told me that although disarranged it was unoccupied.

"She is below," I thought, "and terrified by my entrance has evaded me in the darkness of the hall."

With the purpose of seeking her I turned to leave the room, but took a wrong direction—the right one! My foot struck her, cowering in a corner of the room. Instantly my hands were at her throat, stifling a shriek, my knees were upon her struggling body; and there in the darkness, without a word of accusation or reproach, I strangled her till she died!

There ends the dream. I have related it in the past tense, but the present would be the fitter form, for again and again the somber tragedy reenacts itself in my consciousness—over and over I lay the plan, I suffer the confirmation, I redress the wrong. Then all is blank; and afterward the rains beat against the grimy window-panes, or the snows fall upon my scant attire, the wheels rattle in the squalid streets where my life lies in poverty and mean employment. If there is ever sunshine I do not recall it, if there are birds they do not sing.

There is another dream, another vision of the night. I stand among the shadows in a moonlit road. I am aware of another presence, but whose I cannot rightly determine. In the shadow of a great dwelling I catch the gleam of white garments, then the figure of a woman confronts me in the road—my murdered wife! There is death in the face, there are marks upon the throat. The eyes are fixed on mine with an infinite gravity which is not reproach, nor hate, nor menace, nor anything less terrible than recognition. Before this awful apparition I retreat in terror—a terror that is upon me as I write. I can no longer rightly shape the words. See! they—

Now I am calm, but truly there is no more to tell the incident ends where it began—in darkness and in doubt.

Yes, I am again in control of myself "the captain of my soul." But that is not respite, it is another stage and phase of expiation. My penance, constant in degree, is mutable in kind.

THE MOONLIT ROAD

one of its variants is tranquillity After all, it is only a life-sentence "To Hell for life"—that is a foolish penalty the culprit chooses the duration of his punishment To-day my term expires

To each and all, the peace that was not mine

III

STATEMENT OF THE LATE JULIA HETMAN,
THROUGH THE MEDIUM BAYROLLES

I had retired early and fallen almost immediately into a peaceful sleep, from which I awoke with that indefinable sense of peril which is, I think, a common experience in that other, earlier life Of its unmeaning character, too, I was entirely persuaded, yet that did not banish it My husband, Joel Hetman, was away from home, the servants slept in another part of the house But these were familiar conditions, they had never before distressed me Nevertheless, the strange terror grew so insupportable that conquering my reluctance to move I sat up and lit the lamp at my bedside Contrary to my expectation this gave me no relief, the light seemed rather an added danger, for I reflected that it would shine out under the door, disclosing my presence to whatever evil thing might lurk outside You that are still in the flesh, subject to horrors of the imagination, think what a monstrous fear that must be which seeks in darkness security from malevolent existences of the night That is to spring to close quarters with an unseen enemy—the strategy of despair!

Extinguishing the lamp I pulled the bedclothing about my head and lay trembling and silent, unable to shriek, forgetful to pray In this pitiable state I must have lain for what you call hours—with us there are no hours, there is no time

At last it came—a soft, irregular sound of footfalls on the stairs! They were slow, hesitant, uncertain, as of something that did not see its way, to my disordered reason all the more terrifying for that, as the approach of some blind and mindless malevolence to which is no appeal I even thought that I must have left the hall lamp burning and the groping of this creature proved it a monster of the night. This was fool-

ish and inconsistent with my previous dread of the light, but what would you have? Fear has no brains, it is an idiot. The dismal witness that it bears and the cowardly counsel that it whispers are unrelated. We know this well, we who have passed into the Realm of Terror, who skulk in eternal dusk among the scenes of our former lives, invisible even to ourselves and one another, yet hiding forlorn in lonely places; yearning for speech with our loved ones, yet dumb, and as fearful of them as they of us. Sometimes the disability is removed, the law suspended by the deathless power of love or hate we break the spell—we are seen by those whom we would warn, console, or punish. What form we seem to them to bear we know not, we know only that we terrify even those whom we most wish to comfort, and from whom we most crave tenderness and sympathy.

Forgive, I pray you, this inconsequent digression by what was once a woman. You who consult us in this imperfect way—you do not understand. You ask foolish questions about things unknown and things forbidden. Much that we know and could impart in our speech is meaningless in yours. We must communicate with you through a stammering intelligence in that small fraction of our language that you yourselves can speak. You think that we are of another world. No, we have knowledge of no world but yours, though for us it holds no sunlight, no warmth, no music, no laughter, no song of birds, nor any companionship. O God! what a thing it is to be a ghost, cowering and shivering in an altered world, a prey to apprehension and despair!

No, I did not die of fright. The Thing turned and went away. I heard it go down the stairs, hurriedly, I thought, as if itself in sudden fear. Then I rose to call for help. Hardly had my shaking hand found the doorknob when—merciful heaven!—I heard it returning. Its footfalls as it remounted the stairs were rapid, heavy and loud, they shook the house. I fled to an angle of the wall and crouched upon the floor. I tried to pray. I tried to call the name of my dear husband. Then I heard the door thrown open. There was an interval of unconsciousness, and when I revived I felt a strangling clutch upon my throat—felt my arms feebly beating against something that bore me backward—felt my tongue thrusting

itself from between my teeth! And then I passed into this life.

No, I have no knowledge of what it was The sum of what we knew at death is the measure of what we know afterward of all that went before Of this existence we know many things, but no new light falls upon any page of that, in memory is written all of it that we can read Here are no heights of truth overlooking the confused landscape of that dubitable domain We still dwell in the Valley of the Shadow, lurk in its desolate places, peering from brambles and thickets at its mad, malign inhabitants How should we have new knowledge of that fading past?

What I am about to relate happened on a night. We know when it is night, for then you retire to your houses and we can venture from our places of concealment to move unafraid about our old homes, to look in at the windows, even to enter and gaze upon your faces as you sleep I had lingered long near the dwelling where I had been so cruelly changed to what I am, as we do while any that we love or hate remain Vainly I had sought some method of manifestation, some way to make my continued existence and my great love and poignant pity understood by my husband and son Always if they slept they would wake, or if in my desperation I dared approach them when they were awake, would turn toward me the terrible eyes of the living, frightening me by the glances that I sought from the purpose that I held.

On this night I had searched for them without success, fearing to find them, they were nowhere in the house, nor about the moonlit lawn For, although the sun is lost to us forever, the moon, full-orbed or slender, remains to us Sometimes it shines by night, sometimes by day, but always it rises and sets, as in that other life

I left the lawn and moved in the white light and silence along the road, aimless and sorrowing Suddenly I heard the voice of my poor husband in exclamations of astonishment, with that of my son in reassurance and dissuasion, and there by the shadow of a group of trees they stood—near, so near! Their faces were toward me, the eyes of the elder man fixed upon mine He saw me—at last, at last, he saw me! In the consciousness of that, my terror fled as a cruel dream. The

death-spell was broken Love had conquered Law! Mad with exultation I shouted—I *must* have shouted, “He sees, he sees he will understand!” Then, controlling myself, I moved forward, smiling and consciously beautiful, to offer myself to his arms, to comfort him with endearments, and, with my son’s hand in mine, to speak words that should restore the broken bonds between the living and the dead

Alas! alas! his face went white with fear, his eyes were as those of a hunted animal He backed away from me, as I advanced, and at last turned and fled into the wood—whether, it is not given to me to know

To my poor boy, left doubly desolate, I have never been able to impart a sense of my presence Soon he, too, must pass to this Life Invisible and be lost to me forever

The Curate's Friend

It is uncertain how the Faun came to be in Wiltshire. Perhaps he came over with the Roman legionaries to live with his friends in camp, talking to them of Lucretius, or Garganus or of the slopes of Etna, they in the joy of their recall forgot to take him on board, and he wept in exile, but at last he found that our hills also understood his sorrows, and rejoiced when he was happy. Or, perhaps he came to be there because he had been there always. There is nothing particularly classical about a faun—it is only that the Greeks and Italians have ever had the sharpest eyes. You will find him in the "Tempest" and the "Benedicite", and any country which has beech clumps and sloping grass and very clear streams may reasonably produce him.

How I came to see him is a more difficult question. For to see him there is required a certain quality, for which truthfulness is too cold a name and animal spirits too coarse a one, and he alone knows how this quality came to be in me. No man has the right to call himself a fool, but I may say that I then presented the perfect semblance of one. I was facetious without humour and serious without conviction. Every Sunday I would speak to my rural parishioners about the other world in the tone of one who has been behind the scenes, or I would explain to them the errors of the Pelagians, or I would warn them against hurrying from one dissipation to another. Every Tuesday I gave what I called "straight talks to my lads"—talks which led straight past anything awkward. And every Thursday I addressed the Mothers' Union on the duties of wives or widows, and gave them practical hints on the management of a family of ten.

I took myself in, and for a time I certainly took in Emily. I have never known a girl attend so carefully to my sermons, or laugh so heartily at my jokes. It is no wonder that I became engaged. She has made an excellent wife, freely cor-

recting her husband's absurdities, but allowing no one else to breathe a word against them, able to talk about the subconscious self in the drawing-room, and yet have an ear for the children crying in the nursery, or the plates breaking in the scullery An excellent wife—better than I ever imagined. But she has not married me.

Had we stopped indoors that afternoon nothing would have happened. It was all owing to Emily's mother, who insisted on our tea-ing out Opposite the village, across the stream, was a small chalk down, crowned by a beech copse, and a few Roman earthworks (I lectured very vividly on those earthworks they have since proved to be Saxon) Hither did I drag up a tea-basket and a heavy rug for Emily's mother, while Emily and a little friend went on in front The little friend—who has played all through a much less important part than he supposes—was a pleasant youth, full of intelligence and poetry, especially of what he called the poetry of earth He longed to wrest earth's secret from her, and I have seen him press his face passionately into the grass, even when he has believed himself to be alone Emily was at that time full of vague aspirations, and, though I should have preferred them all to centre in me, yet it seemed unreasonable to deny her such other opportunities for self-culture as the neighbourhood provided

It was then my habit, on reaching the top of any eminence, to exclaim facetiously "And who will stand on either hand and keep the bridge with me?" at the same moment violently agitating my arms or casting my wide-awake at an imaginary foe Emily and the friend received my sally as usual, nor could I detect any insincerity in their mirth Yet I was convinced that some one was present who did not think I had been funny, and any public speaker will understand my growing uneasiness

I was somewhat cheered by Emily's mother, who puffed up exclaiming, "Kind Harry, to carry the things! What should we do without you, even now! Oh, what a view! Can you see the dear Cathedral? No Too hazy. Now I'm going to sit *right* on the rug " She smiled mysteriously "The downs in September, you know "

We gave some perfunctory admiration to the landscape,

which is indeed only beautiful to those who admire land, and to them perhaps the most beautiful in England. For here is the body of the great chalk spider who straddles over our island—whose legs are the south downs and the north downs and the Chilterns, and the tips of whose toes poke out at Cromer and Dover. He is a clean creature, who grows as few trees as he can, and those few in tidy clumps, and he loves to be tickled by quickly flowing streams. He is pimpled all over with earthworks, for from the beginning of time men have fought for the privilege of standing on him, and the oldest of our temples is built upon his back.

But in those days I liked my country snug and pretty, full of gentlemen's residences and shady bowers and people who touch their hats. The great sombre expanses on which one may walk for miles and hardly shift a landmark or meet a genteel person were still intolerable to me. I turned away as soon as propriety allowed and said, "And may I now prepare the cup that cheers?"

Emily's mother replied "Kind man, to help me I always do say that tea out is worth the extra effort. I wish we led simpler lives." We agreed with her. I spread out the food. "Won't the kettle stand? Oh, but *make it stand*!" I did so. There was a little cry, faint but distinct, as of something in pain.

"How silent it all is up here!" said Emily.

I dropped a lighted match on the grass, and again I heard the little cry.

"What is that?" I asked.

"I only said it was so silent," said Emily.

"Silent, indeed," echoed the little friend.

Silent! the place was full of noises. If the match had fallen in a drawing-room it could not have been worse, and the loudest noise came from beside Emily herself. I had exactly the sensation of going to a great party, of waiting to be announced in the echoing hall, where I could hear the voices of the guests, but could not yet see their faces. It is a nervous moment for a self-conscious man, especially if all the voices should be strange to him, and he has never met his host.

"My dear Harry!" said the elder lady, "never mind about that match. That'll smoulder away and harm no one. Tea-ee-

ee! I always say—and you will find Emily the same—that as the magic hour of five approaches, no matter how good a lunch, one begins to feel a sort of—”

Now the Faun is of the kind who capers upon the Neo-Attic reliefs, and if you do not notice his ears or see his tail, you take him for a man and are horrified

“Bathing!” I cried wildly. “Such a thing for our village lads, but I quite agree—more supervision—I blame myself. Go away, bad boy, go away!”

“What will he think of next!” said Emily, while the creature beside her stood up and beckoned to me I advanced struggling and gesticulating with tiny steps and horrified cries, exorcising the apparition with my hat. Not otherwise had I advanced the day before, when Emily’s nieces showed me their guinea pigs. And by no less hearty laughter was I greeted now. Until the strange fingers closed upon me, I still thought that here was one of my parishioners and did not cease to exclaim, “Let me go, naughty boy, let go!” And Emily’s mother, believing herself to have detected the joke, replied, “Well I must confess they are naughty boys and reach one even on the rug: the downs in September, as I said before.”

Here I caught sight of the tail, uttered a wild shriek and fled into the beech copse behind

“Harry would have been a born actor,” said Emily’s mother as I left them.

I realized that a great crisis in my life was approaching, and that if I failed in it I might permanently lose my self-esteem. Already in the wood I was troubled by a multitude of voices—the voices of the hill beneath me, of the trees over my head, of the very insects in the bark of the tree I could even hear the stream licking little pieces out of the meadows, and the meadows dreamily protesting. Above the din—which is no louder than the flight of a bee—rose the Faun’s voice saying, “Dear priest, be placid, be placid: why are you frightened?”

“I am not frightened,” said I—and indeed I was not. “But I am grieved: you have disgraced me in the presence of ladies”

“No one else has seen me,” he said, smiling idly. “The

women have tight boots and the man has long hair Those kinds never see For years I have only spoken to children, and they lose sight of me as soon as they grow up But you will not be able to lose sight of me, and until you die you will be my friend Now I begin to make you happy lie upon your back or run races, or climb trees, or shall I get you blackberries, or harebells, or wives—”

In a terrible voice I said to him, “Get thee behind me!” He got behind me “Once for all,” I continued, “let me tell you that it is vain to tempt one whose happiness consists in giving happiness to others”

“I cannot understand you,” he said ruefully. “What is to tempt?”

“Poor woodland creature!” said I, turning round “How could you understand? It was idle of me to chide you It is not your little nature to comprehend a life of self-denial. Ah! if only I could reach you!”

“You have reached him,” said the hill.

“If only I could touch you!”

“You have touched him,” said the hill.

“But I will never leave you,” burst out the Faun “I will sweep out your shrine for you, I will accompany you to the meetings of matrons I will enrich you at the bazaars”

I shook my head “For these things I care not at all And indeed I was minded to reject your offer of service altogether There I was wrong You shall help me—you shall help me to make others happy”

“Dear priest, what a curious life! People whom I have never seen—people who cannot see me—why should I make them happy?”

“My poor lad—perhaps in time you will learn why Now begone commence On this very hill sits a young lady for whom I have a high regard Commence with her Aha! your face falls I thought as much You *cannot* do anything Here is the conclusion of the whole matter!”

“I can make her happy,” he replied, “if you order me! and when I have done so, perhaps you will trust me more”

Emily's mother had started home, but Emily and the little friend still sat beside the tea-things—she in her white piqué dress and biscuit straw, he in his rough but well-

cut summer suit The great pagan figure of the Faun towered insolently above them

The friend was saying, "And have you never felt the appalling loneliness of a crowd?"

"All that," replied Emily, "have I felt, and very much more—"

Then the Faun laid his hands upon them They, who had only intended a little cultured flirtation, resisted him as long as they could, but were gradually urged into each other's arms, and embraced with passion.

"Miscreant!" I shouted, bursting from the wood "You have betrayed me "

"I know it I care not," cried the little friend "Stand aside. You are in the presence of that which you do not understand In the great solitude we have found ourselves at last."

"Remove your accursed hands!" I shrieked to the Faun.

He obeyed and the little friend continued more calmly "It is idle to chide What should you know, poor clerical creature, of the mystery of love of the eternal man and the eternal woman, of the self-effectuation of a soul?"

"That is true," said Emily angrily "Harry, you would never have made me happy. I shall treat you as a friend, but how could I give myself to a man who makes such silly jokes? When you played the buffoon at tea, your hour was sealed I must be treated seriously. I must see infinities broadening around me as I rise. You may not approve of it, but so I am. In the great solitude I have found myself at last."

"Wretched girl!" I cried. "Great solitude! O pair of helpless puppets—"

The little friend began to lead Emily away, but I heard her whisper to him. "Dear, we can't possibly leave the basket for Harry after this and mother's rug, do you mind having that in the other hand?"

So they departed and I flung myself upon the ground with every appearance of despair.

"Does he cry?" said the Faun.

"He does not cry," answered the hill "His eyes are as dry as pebbles "

My tormentor made me look at him. "I see happiness at the bottom of your heart," said he

"I trust I have my secret springs," I answered stiffly And then I prepared a scathing denunciation, but of all the words I might have said, I only said one and it began with "D."

He gave a joyful cry, "Oh, now you really belong to us To the end of your life you will swear when you are cross and laugh when you are happy Now laugh!"

There was a great silence All nature stood waiting, while a curate tried to conceal his thoughts not only from nature but from himself I thought of my injured pride, of my baffled unselfishness, of Emily, whom I was losing through no fault of her own, of the little friend, who just then slipped beneath the heavy tea basket, and that decided me, and I laughed

That evening, for the first time, I heard the chalk downs singing to each other across the valleys, as they often do when the air is quiet and they have had a comfortable day From my study window I could see the sunlit figure of the Faun, sitting before the beech copse as a man sits before his house And as night came on I knew for certain that not only was he asleep, but that the hills and woods were asleep also The stream, of course, never slept, any more than it ever freezes Indeed, the hour of darkness is really the hour of water, which has been somewhat stifled all day by the great pulsings of the land That is why you can feel it and hear it from a greater distance in the night, and why a bath after sundown is most wonderful

The joy of that first evening is still clear in my memory, in spite of all the happy years that have followed I remember it when I ascend my pulpit—I have a living now—and look down upon the best people sitting beneath me pew after pew, generous and contented, upon the worst people, crowded in the aisles, upon the whiskered tenors of the choir, and the high-browed curates and the church-wardens fingering their bags, and the supercilious vergers who turn late comers from the door I remember it also when I sit in my comfortable bachelor rectory, amidst the carpet slippers that good young ladies have worked for me, and the oak brackets that have been carved for me by good young men, amidst my phalanx of presentation teapots and my illuminated testimonials and all the other offerings of people who believe that I have given them a helping hand, and who really have helped me out of

the mire themselves And though I try to communicate that joy to others—as I try to communicate anything else that seems good—and though I sometimes succeed, yet I can tell no one exactly how it came to me For if I breathed one word of that, my present life, so agreeable and profitable, would come to an end, my congregation would depart, and so should I, and instead of being an asset to my parish, I might find myself an expense to the nation Therefore in the place of the lyrical and rhetorical treatment, so suitable to the subject, so congenial to my profession, I have been forced to use the unworthy medium of a narrative, and to delude you by declaring that this is a short story, suitable for reading in the train.

